

The Many Moods of the Dining Room

By **Stephanie Young**, Ubertati.com
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To half the play's population, the cavernous dining room is a place to flee, demolish, or desecrate. To the other half, it's home sweet home: leisurely breakfasts, the view of the gardens, exquisite meals. Whether you loved or loathed the formal room, one thing is certain: it's been extinct for quite some time, but you can see it again—in all its glory and monstrosity—in Centre Stage's production of A.R. Gurney's "The Dining Room."

In nearly two-dozen scenes (all of them unrelated), six actors play over sixty different characters whose lives are changed (often humorously, and often for the worse) in the dining room. It's a breathless tour-de-force and a stunning study of a culture that is no more. It's unnecessary to note that actors chosen for such demanding work are flexible—they are, and terribly funny also. But three actors deserve special recognition. Each of Anne Elizabeth Butler's characters had such rich emotional depth that I wished the scenes were longer, just so I could see more of these people she created. Allen Evans and Christopher M. Evans also boasted especially crisp, delightful performances.

Despite the zest and humor, the accumulation of so much destruction provides a rather loud indictment of the once-powerful W.A.S.P. culture. Fortunately, the verdict on the dining room itself is still out. This ambiguity is thanks in part to Benjamin P. Robinson's level-headed direction—his characters are people, not caricatures bearing some heavy message. They may be wealthy (or wish they were) but they are still human, and the communal nature of a dining room can still work some positive magic upon them. Part of that magic is in Guy Perticone's subtle lighting. You wouldn't think there's much you could do with a chandelier and some implied french doors—but Perticone works this limited vocabulary with such finesse you scarcely noticed the room's stunning mood swings.

The dining room it turns out, is the most noble character in Gurney's play—holding and hiding and softening the edges of a high-stress, high-stakes population. When the room fades into memory, into dream and reminiscence, you'll wish you could resurrect it, if not necessarily all of its inhabitants.

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A.R. Gurney's "The Dining Room" Directed by Benjamin P. Robinson. With Anne Elizabeth Butler, Katy Beth Cassell, Allen Evans, Christopher M. Evans, Cindy Mixon, and Jeff Warren.

Presented by **Centre Stage**, 501 River Street, Greenville, SC (864) 233-6733. Through June 27. Tickets \$25, with discounts for seniors and students.

