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Brighton Beach Memoirs
Brings the Laughs at Theatre Three

by Barbara Anne Kirshner January 20, 2026

If you thought the holiday gift giving season was over, think again! **Theatre Three**'s current production of *Brighton Beach Memoirs* delivers a delightful gift of laughter that is most welcomed for this season or any.

Master of comedy, Neil Simon, kept us entertained with his portraits of characters dishing out witty one liners etched against the poignant human experience with unforgettable jewels like *The Odd Couple*, *Chapter Two*, *Come Blow Your Horn* and *Plaza Suite*. It is with *Brighton Beach Memoirs* (1983) that Simon started his semi-autobiographical "Eugene Trilogy" which was followed up with *Biloxi Blues* (1985) and *Broadway Bound* (1986).

Brighton Beach Memoirs opened on Broadway on March 27, 1983, directed by Gene Saks with a cast featuring Matthew Broderick as Eugene, Elizabeth Franz as Kate and Joyce Van Patten as Blanche. The play received the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play and was nominated for the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding New Play. The movie adaptation in 1986 was directed once again by Gene Saks with Jonathan Silverman as Eugene, Amagansett's Blythe Danner as Kate and Judith Ivey as Blanche. A revival opened on Broadway in 2009.

Brighton Beach Memoirs is set in 1937 during the Great Depression and with World War II impending. The action centers on 15-year-old Eugene Morris Jerome, a Jewish teenager living in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, with his Polish immigrant family consisting of his mother, Kate, father, Jack, older brother, Stanley, and extended family Blanche, widowed sister to Kate, with her two daughters, Nora and Laurie. They all live together in a cramped apartment and must deal with economic hardships and family dynamics that lead to clashes juxtaposed with high comedy.

Eugene is the narrator with humorous asides to the audience commenting on his family and his hopes and dreams of becoming a baseball player. When we first see Eugene, he is winding up about to pitch a ball saying, "I hate my name, Eugene Morris Jerome! How will I play with the Yankees with a name like Eugene Morris Jerome." He is also a writer constantly jotting down notes as he observes all the goings-on with his family. "I'm going to be a writer if it doesn't work out with the Yankees," Eugene says. "I'm telling you, my memoirs in the community of Brighton Beach." He adds, "I want to write all this down in case I grow up twisted, so the world will know why."

It is from Eugene's perspective that we get an inside look at the struggles, strong emotional support and sacrifices of his family and his own coming of age needs and desires that are at times hysterical.

This current production at Theatre Three is deftly directed by Colleen Rebecca Britt who makes the most of Simon's comedy while adding heart to all the poignant moments. What we get is a ride of laughter, followed by a clash, but always leading to more laughter. It is Neil Simon after all who was brilliant at lacing comedy into drama, and that's what Britt does so well in her directorial choices. Britt has assembled a stellar cast who takes us to the 1930s through tempo, movement and a Brooklyn, working-class Jewish accent reminiscent of the times.

Kiernan Urso (Eugene) is a company member at Theatre Three where he just closed in ***A Christmas Carol*** playing Young Scrooge. Urso is a gifted actor who seems to have reached new heights in his role as Eugene. He is constantly entertaining, real and so laugh-out-loud funny.

Linda May (Kate) is a Theatre Three regular for a good reason. May is a multi-talented actress who has the ability to transform into every character she portrays. Here May becomes the matriarch, Kate, infusing a singular rhythm with her gait and voice. We are brought into Kate's world, seeing her struggles between strict values, the burden of being caretaker for everyone in the household, and worrying about her family. We feel the weight of trying to support a family during the Great Depression through Angelo DiBiase's finely crafted portrayal of patriarch Jack. DiBiase shows us this overwrought father constantly toiling to provide for his family, running from his day job as a fabric cutter to his stressful side job selling party favors and noisemakers, and our hearts go out to him.

Michael Anthony Shapiro gives a sensitive portrait of Stanley, the 18-year-old brother who Eugene trusts as his confidant, the person he talks freely with about everything, from life in general to sexuality. Stanley feels the weight on his shoulders as he works in an unsatisfying job to help his father provide for the family, but in his zeal to do so, he makes a misfortunate decision.

Suzie Dunn's vulnerable portrayal of Blanche Morton is an excellent foil to her older sister Kate. Blanche is the dependent sister having to move in with Kate and her family after her husband dies. Dunn shows us the depth of this overwhelmed woman having to raise her two daughters and needing her big sister's help to do so. Emilia Guzzetta sparkles as Nora, the 16 ½ year old daughter to Blanche. She's a dreamer who is ready to drop out of school to pursue a life in the theater. The confrontational scene between the independent Nora and gentle spirited Blanche becomes a revelation for both. Erin Risolo, who recently played the title role in ***Annie*** at Theatre Three, brings 13-year-old Laurie, the younger daughter to Blanche, alive with a delicacy that shapes this character who uses her weak heart as an excuse for not helping with chores. Her penchant for isolating herself in her room reading is an annoyance to her big sister Nora who must do twice the work, and to Eugene who is the constant runner to Greenblatt's grocery for a variety of household staples.

The bi-level set designed by Randall Parsons has the living room and dining room on the main stage with the bedrooms upstairs offering more play area on the Theatre Three stage. Lighting by Steven Uihlein adds to the pacing of the show and takes our attention to the upstairs or main level focusing on the action. Jason Allyn's period piece costumes give the 1930s flavor with Eugene's knickers, Stanley's long pants with argyle sweater, Jack's suit and later his robe, and wide skirts on Kate and Blanche.

Brighton Beach Memoirs is the best of Neil Simon and in the hands of Theatre Three it makes for a brilliant night of comedy. Catch it now through February 8, 2026.

Theatre Three is located at 412 Main Street, Port Jefferson. 631-928-9100, ***theatrethree.com***

Barbara Anne Kirshner is a freelance journalist and photographer whose celebrity interviews, theatre reviews, features and human interest stories appear in major publications. She is author of the children's chapter book, Madison Weatherbee the Different Dachshund*,* Madison Weatherbee the Musical *and a host of one-act plays that have been produced across Long Island.*