



## BWW Review: FAITHLESS: A Family in Crisis

by [Nancy Grossman](#) Dec. 17, 2016



### *Faithless*

A Boston University New Play Initiative Production, Written by Andrew [Joseph Clarke](#), Directed by Stephen Pick; Scenic Design, Baron E. Pugh; Lighting Design, Brandi Marie Pick; Sound Design, J Jumbelic; Costume Design, Megan Mills; Dramaturgy, Beirut Balutis; Stage Manager, Renee E. Yancey; Assistant Stage Manager, Annie Aruba-Walker

CAST: [Maureen Keiller](#), [Greg Maraio](#), Christine Power, Abby

Knipp

Performances through December 18 at Boston Playwrights' Theatre, 949 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA; Box Office 866-811-4111 or [www.bostonplaywrights.org](http://www.bostonplaywrights.org)

Playwright Andrew [Joseph Clarke](#) sticks four people in a windowless waiting room with institutional lighting, the kind that unflatteringly shows all of your flaws, and...SCENE. While their mother lies dying in an offstage hospital bed, siblings Maureen, Skip, Patty, and the latter's teenage daughter Sam hold a vigil, alternately debating Mom's fate and rehashing family history, struggling to find elusive closure and rebuild lost connections.

*Faithless*, a Boston University New Play Initiative production at Boston Playwrights' Theatre, is an intimate study of a Boston Irish-Catholic family facing a crisis. On the surface, the immediate critical point is their mother's ill health and impending death, and all the emotional turmoil that comes with the territory. However, not so secondary to that is a crisis of faith, or a difference in beliefs among the adult children. Before Skip enters the picture, elder sister Maureen ([Maureen Keiller](#)) and Patty (Christine Power) go back and forth about whether or not to authorize surgery or ask only for comfort measures, as well as what Mom would want. Maureen clings to her Catholic faith, believing that only God should determine when life ends, and they should continue the fight, while Patty, a former nurse, hews to a secular line and opts for letting go.

Prodigal son Skip ([Greg Maraio](#)) returns from a ten-year absence, opening old wounds and rivalries. He has a chance to explain the real reasons for his departure and the depth of the feud with their late father who rejected him because of his homosexuality. At the same time, Skip and Sam (Abby Knipp), whom he last saw at her fifth birthday party, form a bond that helps to steady her as she sails into stormy adolescent waters. In a play that runs just 60 minutes, Clarke is able to touch upon a number of serious topics, some of which are better resolved than others, but all are given thoughtful consideration.

Clarke successfully conveys who these people are, but give a lot of credit to the portrayals by these four actors. Keiller inhabits the complexities of the older, unmarried, school teacher who has been the mother's caretaker. We can virtually see that her white-knuckled hold on her religion is the one thing that tethers her. Her disapproval of her brother is written all over her face when Skip unexpectedly appears, but she also provides a supportive shoulder when needed. Maraio gives a nuanced performance, a mixture of shame and defiance, and draws our sympathy for the things he has survived within the family. Power's character has fewer shades, but she plays Patty's controlling tendencies well. Knipp is a natural as the eye-rolling teen who knows she's often smarter than the trio of adults.

The stark scenic design (Baron E. Pugh), with linoleum flooring and groupings of molded plastic chairs, and overhead fluorescent lights (Brandi Marie Pick) provide the oppressive atmosphere of a generic hospital waiting room. [Sound Designer](#) J Jumbelic adds the recognizable ringtone of a hospital phone in the background and the too-loud drone of an unseen television. Into this familiar, sterile environment, Director Stephen Pick plunks down the Foleys, most often each in his or her own corner of the room. As their intense conversations take place, Pick uses his blocking as a metaphor to indicate the emotional distance between the siblings. It is a subtle tool, but most effective, especially during several long pauses when the characters, as well as the audience, are visibly discomfited. *Faithless* makes an impression as it takes on the end of life issue, but the conversation needs to be continued.

**Photo credit: Kalman Zabarsky ([Maureen Keiller](#), Christine Power, Abby Knipp, [Greg Maraio](#))**