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## **‘Dinner’ serves food for thought**

PLAY REVIEW: The production of *‘Dinner With Friends’* by the Readers Theatre Group of Mohonk Mountain Stage Company has a lot of heart.

By Fernando Valdivia  
For the *Times Herald-Record*

In his Pulitzer Prize winning *“Dinner With Friends,”* Donald Margulies examines with compassion and insight the effect of a divorce on the separating couple’s married friends. Under the direction of Robert G. Miller at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in New Paltz, four exceptionally talented members of the Readers Theatre Group of Mohonk Mountain Stage Company demonstrate just how well written and crafted this play is.

Because two of the characters are husband-and-wife gourmet cooks, they express their love for their friends by hosting intimate dinner get-togethers that open both the first and second acts of the play. When Beth (Ann Citron) tearfully informs her best friends, Gabe (Bruce Pileggi) and Karen (Christine Crawfis), at dinner one evening that her husband, Tom (Richard Cattabiani), has left her for another woman she disparagingly identifies as an airline stewardess, her hosts are shocked. Their friends seemed fine just before Gabe and Karen left for a brief working vacation in Italy. To learn upon their return that Tom has been having an affair and wants a divorce causes them to wonder about their own seemingly secure relationship.

Thanks to the excellent performance of the cast, the subsequent change in Beth and Tom as their mutual hostility and self-pity in the first act are replaced by their new-found happiness with new partners in the second is underscored by concurrent alterations in Gabe and Karen. Ann Citron is convincing as the homemaker-cum-artist who sees herself as the betrayed wife but continues to have anger-induced sex with her estranged husband. Richard Cattabiani is equally skilled at expressing Tom’s unfulfillment as a lawyer and increasing isolation as a husband. His affair with a travel agent is indicative of his need for direction.

In contrast to the somewhat flaky Beth, Christine Crawfis plays Karen as a loving helpmate whose enduring relationship with her husband is nevertheless threatened by their friends’ marital break-up. Bruce Pileggi portrays Gabe as a perceptively sensitive husband and father who realizes that coping with life’s inconstant nature requires small adjustments, not unlike a reliable recipe that may need a little of more of this and a little less of that to fully satisfy.