

STAGE

Paul Weitz Brings *Privilege* To NY

By Iris Wiener
info@longislandernews.com

Privilege opens to the blips and bleeps of a recognizable video game all too familiar to anyone having grown up in the '80s. This welcoming choice curiously wraps itself around us, only to be stylistically abandoned within a few moments' time. We're meant to relate to the two young brothers playing and interacting in a bedroom completely reminiscent of our own. Slowly, however, the reality of *Privilege* rears its differential head. This household exudes wealth, which is exhibited in a live-in maid, designer clothing, and talk of elaborate vacations. We know why the play was given such a title; the answer to how is what makes this exploration so intriguing.

Charlie (Conor Donovan), age 12, and Porter (Harry Zittel), age 16, are two brothers living a sheltered life in the Upper East Side. They entertain themselves by throwing darts at a picture of Ronald Reagan, shooting hoops behind the bedroom door, and moaning about the boredom that defines their lives. We want to believe that they're like us, but it's hard to get past their parents' designer clothing, the chauffeured limousines that escort them to school, and their family's impromptu trips to Antigua. What we are inclined to feel is the slight of privilege that the wealthy can often demonstrate to those less "fortunate." Our compassion for these characters is smartly intertwined with this sense of inadequacy, a lead into a story loaded with questions and irony.

Charlie and Porter's lives are irrevocably changed when their father is accused of insider trading. Through the eyes of the two boys, we're given an inside look at the so-



Photo Courtesy Richard Kornberg and Associates

Paul Weitz's *Privilege*, which closes on May 15, is a dark comedy set in the 1980s starring Carolyn McCormick and Bob Saget.

cial consequences of scandal and controversy. Writer Paul Weitz (*In Good Company*, *About A Boy*, *American Pie*) sets this stage well. One might think that the use of two adolescents as protagonists in a live production would be a risky, illogical approach. But Weitz delivers, as do his two stars. Charlie is equally naïve and intuitive, and

Donovan plays these two attributes off of one another brilliantly. A charmingly cute, sentimental actor, he'll surely be turning casting directors' heads within the next decade. Zittel has a more common talent, but is still impressive as the tortured, dorky older brother. In one heart-wrenching scene between Porter and his depressed, deluded mother, we watch his face fall as we mutually realize the loveless, emotionally empty parental upbringing this young man has survived.

Most would not equate *Full House*'s Bob Saget with a parentally challenged, sweet-talking criminal. But his innocent, fatherly veneer is astonishingly perfect for the role of Ted, the kids' father. His role is that of a real man with weaknesses and boundaries, which for him include greed and affection. Saget transforms him into a stoic but likable figure, demonstrating his versatility as an actor. The boys' mother, played by Carolyn McCormick, is somewhat dry and a bit whiny at times. McCormick doesn't seem to connect with her audience, but then her character doesn't connect with those around her either.

Darkly comedic, *Privilege* never lets its audience down. As the family continues to face the reality of Ted's choices, an impending cliché ending threatens to rear its ugly head. However, we are rewarded with a closure that encompasses the complexity of the unknown. A smooth run with creative theatrical elements often missing from Off-Broadway productions (hear the music, see the adept set!), Weitz' latest is a true testament of the excitement that can be experienced with an original production.

For tickets to *Privilege*, call 212-246-4422 or 800-766-6048 or visit www.secondstagetheatre.com.