

Entertainment

Examining our rediscovered obsession with "parenting"

Workshop West labours through opener

It's Your Turn to Get Up!
Workshop West
til October 20

review by Rachel McKenzie and Paula Simons

Workshop West's new production, *It's Your Turn to Get Up!*, is a salute to the baby boomlet, an energetic and affable examination of our culture's new rediscovered obsession with the ancient art of "parenting". The framework for this collectively written musical comedy is the conceit of the theatre as a classroom in "Baby Limbo", with the audience students at a seminar for babies about to be born. The five cast members each take on a dual-persona, appearing first as the infant instructors in the classroom, and second as adults, facing the pleasures and problems of parenthood. To prepare for this seminar, the members of Workshop West have done their homework, interviewing parents and working authentic anecdotes into the script. The interest and enthusiasm of everyone involved in the production is obvious; however, any clear direction and development is much harder to see.

From its opening minutes, the play is likable and entertaining. The seminar format allows the cast, particularly the energetic "Brendakid", played by Susan Sneath, to involve the audience directly, to make observers into active participants. The set, designed by Ernie Tomlinson to look like a fantastical oversized nursery, has a naive charm, and Bev Ross's upbeat melodies and clever lyrics give the show sparkle and zip. So, if everything from the costumes to the choreography is amusing and vibrant, why does the production feel so sloppy and soppy?

There are some genuinely funny, moving, and truthful moments in the play — it's worth the price of admission to see Daniel



The cast of *It's Your Turn to Get Up!*: no immaculate conception

Libman as Brian Mulroney, or as Mathew, a Yuppy architect bemoaning the presence of a babyseat in the front of his Porsche. David McNally is also fun to watch, particularly as the personification of every parent's nightmare, "The Bad Influence". Best of all is Dorothy — Ann Haug's monologue at the end of the first act; here Lynne, an "in control" junior law partner buckles under the pressure of a ten-hour labour. With perfect

pace, and a lovely combination of irony and compassion, Haug brings Lynne from a proudly independent career woman, determined to enjoy as natural a pregnancy as possible, to a valuable, vulnerable fan of Demerol. This vignette of idealism tempered by reality is as touching as it is hilarious.

Unfortunately, the second act of the play cannot live up to the humour and vitality of the first. Two and a half hours of cute is just too much. Worse still, the second act strives to be serious, to discuss everything from

infant mortality, to nuclear weapons testing, to reincarnation. The coy conceit of the baby seminar is just too weak to bear this weighty philosophical and political consciousness. The sudden shift from the inoffensively bright and bubbly to the ideologically forced and phoney left us most uncomfortable.

The inability of the second act to fulfill the promise of the first demonstrates the two major flaws in *It's Your Turn to Get Up!*: lack of editorial control, and a tendency to become didactic. Although the play has many fine and funny moments, they do not fit together. Too many good ideas are worked to death, too many productions numbers run longer than they should. Especially in a collective creation like this, someone must cut out the scenes that don't work, and tighten up the scenes that do. Someone must ensure that the play has some cohesion, and is not just a collection of individual monologues. Often times, the action becomes too cluttered and clumsy to maintain its energy and appeal.

The second problem with the play is more subtle, and indeed, it may not be a problem for everyone. On the whole, this production has an extremely narrow focus. With the proverbial zeal of the converted, these "new parents" are out to preach the doctrine of "parenting". Now, if you've just had a baby, or are thinking about having one, great, this play's for you. Otherwise you may begin to feel like a heretic, in the face of all this porselytising. Granted, there is a token non-parent on the stage, but he decides to dedicate his life to building orphanages. There is disquieting subtext of smug self-righteousness, here among the fruitful folk.

Problems aside, *It's Your Turn to Get Up!* is still enjoyable entertainment, with a worthy share of wit, colour, and charm. At its best, it's funny, fresh, and flippant. While it's no immaculate conception, it's worth seeing... if you can find a sitter for the kids.

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