



Shakin Pyramids

Three stray cats from Scotland strut into Dinwoodie Friday, October 14, 8:00 PM with their own brand of rockabilly, be-bop, rhythm and blues, country, jump-swing, Tennessee rock 'n' roll, and reeferbilly boogie.

Church skewered in comedy

Sister Mary Ignatius Explains it All For You/The Actor's Nightmare
Phoenix Theatre until Oct. 23

Review By Christina Starr

Tom Wood, graduate from the University of Alberta Drama Department, returns to Edmonton to play the leading role of Sister Mary Ignatius and George Spelvin in Christopher Durang's very funny, very daring dramas.

Durang has taken more than a few risks in his criticism of the Catholic Church as Educator in "Sister Mary Ignatius." The presumptuousness suggested by the title is the defining element throughout the play. Sister Mary, or, the institution of the Catholic Church, can "explain it all to you" in simple, straightforward, unquestionable dogma.

"Heaven, Hell, Purgatory!" proclaims Sister Mary, is life after death in a nutshell, and no further explanation need be given. (There used to be Limbo for children who died before they knew the difference between good and evil, but some years ago the Second Vatican Council decided that Limbo didn't exist.)

Such is the manner of Sister Mary's lecture on life and death, and Tom Wood is brilliant in giving us the character of the unabashed, outspoken nun with the unquestionable authority of the Catholic Church behind her. Her faith and her church are nonproblematic; any and all controversies are resolved by "the infallible office of the Pope."

Sister Mary's life's work has been to teach, or rather drill, her doctrine into young, persuasive, unreasoning children, some of whom, during this lecture, return to confront her with the discovery that her rules for life do not apply outside the convent. In response to her query of the school grade of the grown-up pupil the retort comes back quick and sharp, "I'm in life!"

The play has somewhat of a hurdle to confront in this moment of transition from a farcical satire to tense emotional drama, yet Sister Mary carries it through with her ingrained naivete towards the outside world and her unflinching confidence in the applicability of the Catholic Church doctrine.

Durang does not attack the fundamentals of the Christian religion; rather, he points out some very touchy subjects where we see Sister Mary herself afraid to tread.

Yet although we may come away questioning some longheld traditions and beliefs, we also come away with tears in our eyes from laughter. Durang's humour is vicious, powerful, and extremely clever.

Wood's dramatization of this humour is perfect. We've all met Sister Mary somewhere before, but never has she been so entertaining.

Wood is backed up by a strong support cast. After having been very impressed with Bill Davidson and Robert Morelli in the Fringe Theatre's production of "All Men Are Whores" and "The Sermon" (for which performances Robert Morelli won the Fringe's Best Actor Award), I was excited to see them again as permanent members of the Phoenix Theatre's acting staff. Janis Nickleson and Shelley Irvine were also impressive in their various roles throughout the two plays.

"The Actor's Nightmare" is an effective opener to Sister Mary's lecture. It is fun, sharp with Durang's brilliant humour and has a Woody Allen flavour in its paranoid theme. It is an accountant's dream of being thrust onto centre stage with no lines and no idea of the play. His panic-stricken confession, "I don't remember being to a single rehearsal" sets the stage (so to speak) for the entrance of the lost and confused disciples of Sister Mary later on.

The plays are a must for all who enjoy the laughter, as well as the harsh criticism provoked by satiric theatre. If this performance is indicative of the season to follow, Edmonton theatre-goers cannot applaud enough the efforts of the Phoenix Theatre.

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