

6/8/2009

Theater review: 'Fireflies' an edgy ...

Theater review: 'Fireflies' an edgy morality tale

By **Tamara Le**

May 21, 2009 6:00 AM

Coming Out, apparently, has gotten quaint.

Just delete a few R-rated jokes and X-rated innuendos from, "Fireflies," anyway, and the show just might pop-up as an endearing ABC After-School Special.

Or, wherever those cool, edgy, morality tales that are programmed these days.

Rich with character, plot and accent, David J. Mauriello's world premiere at the Ring is evidence of a turning point in Americana. Damn the anxiety. The playwright encourages carrots in the tomato gardens of life (his words) to get on with it already.

An ensemble la familia proves the perfect story-telling dynamic for "Fireflies." Familiarity, oft an inevitable straw for the closeted, turns out to be a backbone.

Germinating themes of multi-generational Italian families, Catholicism old and new and city mouse/country mouse, the dramatic-comedy fosters a garden lush with cross-over lessons in unconditional love, self-acceptance and respecting the power of Mother Nature.

Although you don't meet her until the second Act, the show centers on an Italian matriarch, Carmela (Jean Wadman). Simple in wisdom and shrewd in maternal maneuverings, Carmela manages to get what she wants and give everyone else what they need.

Wadman personifies why you never mess with women who toil the earth. You can keep knowledge. Patience is power.

The baby of the family, Peter (David Allan Burke) endures the emotional roller coasting the show's script commands, with both hands in the air. From lover to son to sibling, Burke adeptly takes us from his manicured, in-control pseudo-life in the city to the reality of life among those who know him better than he does himself.

Kevin (James Steele) brings much needed sass and sex appeal to the show. He's almost as cunning as his future mother-in-law.

Angie (Constance Whitman) is the sister you're always better off having on your side, despite the inevitability sooner or later she will cut you to ribbons. Or pose life's most uncomfortable questions at the worst possible moment.

With no less than all of small-town, Italian America represented on his shoulders, oldest brother Ray (Chuck Galle) embodies generational and seismic changes in acceptance, tolerance and wisdom.

His wife Connie (Kari Crettela Nickou) is the perfect wise and whimsical in-law. I promise you'll never make meatballs without thinking of her, or perhaps Ray, again.

And while the script is very strong, the ending was a little like pasta sauce warmed in the microwave. Despite two hours in length, the show's ending needs some serious simmering. Omitting or trimming a scene would help, as would picking up the pace in the second act. A few wittier or subtler sexual innuendos would also sharpen the flavor a BAM or two.

Special commendation to director/set designer Craig Fogg and Carl Gettelman for staging an entire act in an outdoor garden. But then, other than hope springing eternal, there may be nothing more intuitive than the birds and the bees. Or in this case, Fireflies.

WHAT FIREFLIES

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WHEN through May 31, Fri.: 8 p.m.; Sat.: 3 and 8 p.m.; Sun.: 7 p.m.

WHERE The Players' Ring, 105 Marcy St., Portsmouth

COST Adults \$12, students/members \$10; 12-under \$6

CONTACT 436-8123, www.playersring.org