

Theater

Santa Cruz Actors' Theatre delivers spine-tingling horror with 'Feathers and Teeth'

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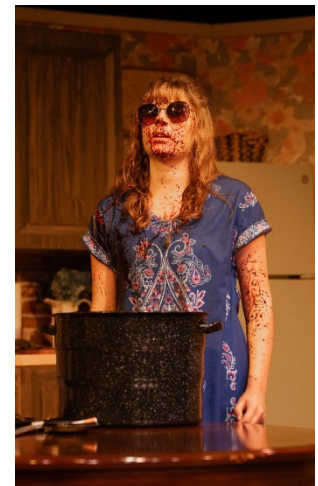


Santa Cruz Actors' Theatre continues performances of the dark comedy "Feathers and Teeth" through Oct. 31. (Credit — Davis Banta/Right Hand Creative)

Have you been a habitué of haunted houses, a spectator of spookiness or a fan of the feeling of horror? If you possess a penchant for delving into darkness, then the new Halloween production at Santa Cruz Actors' Theatre should be on your list of fun things to do this October. "Feathers and Teeth" is a masterpiece of the morbid, a perfect play to put you in the mood for howling at the moon, and it is artfully directed, masterfully designed and acted with just the right mixture of comedy and malice.

Charise Castro Smith's creepy story is set in the late 1970s in a small midwestern town, and Lars Fabiunke has created an amazing scenic design that evokes the feeling of a '70s sitcom. You can see an exceptional degree of care went into constructing the set and designing the interior to transport the audience to another place and time, familiar but gone. This artistry makes it that much easier to delve into the world the characters inhabit; the cartoonish realism of the set is a perfect counterpoint to the horrific events soon to ensue.

There is a similarly nostalgic quality to the acting; the cast delightfully plays up the caricatures of the time. Their over-the-top style adds to the comical element of the play, creating a stark contrast with the sinister plot elements. They manage



Jay Lokey plays Chris in "Feathers and Teeth," the 13-year-old grieving daughter. (Credit — Davis Banta/Right Hand Creative)

something difficult and rewarding — they play the time period and commit to the emotions of the piece, mixing mannerism and realism effectively. Under Miguel Reyna's direction, this talented cast has created something masterful.

Jay Lokey plays the emotionally disturbed Chris, distraught over the loss of her recently deceased mother and enraged at her father for moving on so quickly romantically with the hospice nurse. Lokey plays the vicissitudes of this emotional journey with the full amplitude of adolescent rage. She should be grieving, but the situation calls first for fury, and she delivers her anger adeptly.



Jennifer Deon Stanford, left, plays Carol, alongside Ben Canant who stars as Arthur in "Feathers and Teeth." (Credit — Davis Banta/Right Hand Creative)

Ben Canant plays Arthur, her charming but oafish dad, a man who is too easily deceived. Canant's physicality provides a healthy dose of physical comedy as he allows himself to be twisted and bent into situations that are both comical and sad. Canant plays this dupe of a man with enough charisma to balance out his loathsome character. Instead of helping his daughter to deal with her loss, he is making out with a new woman, and it is only because of Canant's charm that Arthur is anything more than a detestable fool.

Jennifer Deon Stanford plays Carol, the opportunistic hospice nurse who swoops in on this readymade family. She sees in Arthur the home she never had, and she cunningly uses her sexuality to claim her territory. She plants a big fat flag in Arthur's heart, and he stupidly accedes to her conquest. But, it is not without some challenge. Chris is not willing to accept defeat and fights back against the Carol-fabricated fate. This sets up the catty dynamic between Carol and Chris, and Stanford plays the wicked potential stepmother with feigned innocence and cynical cruelty. Moving back and forth between these two archetypes, Stanford plays up the artificial niceness of Carol so that her true intentions are distressing to say the least.

The fourth maestro in this magnificent quartet is Toby Nolzco, who plays Hugo, the German boy next door who has a big crush on Chris. Nolzco is hilarious as Hugo and gives the play a true sense of innocent sweetness badly needed in this toxic arrangement. Hugo only wants to help Chris, and his puppy dog devotion is adorable.

This play is a punchy little masterpiece. So many things are working together to synthesize comedy and horror — Davis Banta's sound design, Ian Dyer's props, Greg Roe's signature special effects (the bloody spurts reminiscent of his "Evil Dead" production), Josephine Czarnecki's lighting design, and Greg and Aumari Roe's creepy creature sounds combine to magnificent effect. For a quality Halloween scare, you don't need to go to a haunted house this year. Get yourself some tickets to "Feathers and Teeth" and experience the glorious gore for yourself.

The Halloween horror production continues performances at the Santa Cruz Actors' Theatre at 1001 Center St., Santa Cruz, through Oct. 31. Tickets range from \$32 to \$35, and are 2 for 1 on Thursday. The production contains graphic violence and is recommended for mature audiences aged 16 and older. Visit santacruzactorstheatre.org for details and tickets.