



<< Jan 2017 >>

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
26	27	28	29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	1	2	3	4	5

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CATEGORY ARCHIVES: THEATER REVIEWS

8 Tens@8 Festival 2017

Posted on [January 8, 2017](#)



By Philip Pearce

FOR THE SECOND YEAR in a row Actors' Theatre's popular annual ten-minute play festival has grown into a double feature. "8 Tens@8" is now really 16 Tens, eight of them offered on so-called "A" nights and eight others on "B" nights.

I was due to catch both sets but I chickened out and sacrificed my "B" night ticket to the daunting prospect of 80 miles in a major rainstorm and my imminent flight to London.

"A" night offered an interesting emphasis on male-bonding with three plays about pairs of men exploring their relationships.

Steve Koppman's is *Boy Talk* and that's what it is, with super-confident twenty-something Jerry (a funny and voluble Timothy Randazzo) recalling a recent singles bar pickup that could produce some exciting new dating adventures for his buddy Dave (Alex Garrett). But that will only happen if the more focused and wary Dave can be dead sure of it... But that is something you'll either have to see for yourself or never discover.

Male-bonding takes an erotic turn in Brian Spencer's *Shakespeare's Boy* (photo by Jana Marcus). A pair of Elizabethan actors named Richard (Burbage?) and Alexander prepare to play the lead roles in the premiere performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. Cast as Romeo, Richard (John Wasielewski) finds himself attracted to co-star Alexander (Timothy Randazzo) even when Alex is not in full Juliet-gear and makeup. Using Shakespeare's text as a guide, the men explore pros and cons of sexually expressing their offstage relationship. The fact that their arguments are pretty complex and are couched in well-crafted 16th century English made their negotiations a challenge to at least one member of the audience. Me.

The third bonding of the evening happened in Jody McColman's abstract but eloquent "A Long Time Coming," which covers a deep, extended friendship between Adam (Sam Johnson) and Ben (John Wasielewski). Johnson and Wasielewski (who had a busy evening) gave performances that seemed effortless because each had so clearly worked into the hearts and souls of two well-developed characters. No florid acting or dramatic pyrotechnics, just a sense of watching real people facing real life. It was my favorite play of the evening.

Not that I didn't enjoy two scripts built on engagingly cuckoo concepts. Clear audience favorite was Richard Chin's *TRUE*, a slick piece of social satire with a bemused Alex Garrett now busy considering the purchase of a robotic erotic partner with the help of smarmy saleswoman Danielle Crook. The acting and direction, by Anita Natale, were brisk and clever.

Nearly as funny were Daria Troxell's struggles in *The Third Person* to keep a relentless Jackson Wolfe, who calls himself The Narrator, from spouting stentorian voice-over descriptions of everything she thinks, says or does in a real life emotional crisis.

Flowers by Sheila Cowley opened the evening with a pleasant piece of domestic comedy. *The Nice View* by Cynthia Veal Holm ended it with some insights into the value of local color and private-friendship over clinical-therapy.

Iron Man probably looked like an intriguing idea on the page, but on stage it strapped actress Lillian Bogovich and director Susan Forrest with a story told by a motionless polio victim named Beezie. Beezie's lines are wry and provocative enough, but playwright Claudia Sternbach forces her to deliver them while trapped in an iron lung with only her disembodied head showing. Bogovich made a laudable effort to flesh out her assignment, but it imposed physical and dramatic restrictions that would challenge even the comic timing and imagination of a Tina Fey or a Lily Tomlin.

At a time when community theaters are struggling for funding and audience, it's heartening that the festival can attract 16 playable short scripts from writers all over the country and can recruit directors, casts and crews to rehearse and mount all of them.