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CATEGORY ARCHIVES: THEATER REVIEWS

8 Tens @ 8 "B"

Posted on [January 10, 2019](#)



By Philip Pearce

NIGHT "B" of 8 Tens @ 8, the annual Santa Cruz theater festival, served up a more interesting variety of characters, situations and viewpoints than Night "A" did. This second batch of winning scripts takes a look, sometimes satirically, sometimes not, at art, science, life, death, the supernatural, petty crime and labor disputes.

Love at the Louvre by Dianne Sposito links the Mona Lisa (a charming and optimistic Sarah Marsh) and a re-armed and towel-wrapped Venus de Milo (Sophia Alexander-Sidhoun, all opinionated tizzie and sparkle). The girls take a break from their work spaces during museum closing hours to chat about art, artists and the works they produce. Having concluded that it boils down to love, Mona Lisa returns to her frame, Venus to her pedestal. The versatile Marsh reappears in *Where's This Train Going?*, that being the question that breaks the ice between her and the tidy, preoccupied guy (Nic Terbeek) seated next to her in a Manhattan subway car. As charming and outgoing as ever, she explains she's a wide-eyed first-time visitor to the Big Apple and loves meeting new people. Bruce Guelden's funny and sharply plotted parable reminds us that you can't always believe everything you're told.

Gwen Flager's *Jornada Del Muerto* is kind of like Tennessee Williams on an off night. In spite of some good acting by Tara McMilin as a bag lady and Austin Bruce as the broken down drag queen she helps to die with dignity, I found it confused and pretentious.

There's sharp satire in two other plays. *The Greyback Payback* pits Steve Capasso as a carpenter named Eddie who doesn't say so but probably voted for Trump against Scott Kravitz as a man named Neil who probably didn't. Eddie says Neil has failed to pay up for a roofing job he did for him; Neil insists he has paid. They put their dispute to arbitration conducted by Gail Borkowski. Author Mark Saunders uses the arbitration hearing to structure a pleasing odd couple confrontation that's full of laughs sprinkled with social class implications and some unexpected revelations.

Even better as a piece of comic irony is Brian Spencer's *The Rug* (photo above.) A lad named Jerry (Eli McMilin) girds his loins for the painful challenge of coming out to his stridently conventional Mom (Tara McMilin again). It's a predictable enough situation these days, but Spencer pulls the rug out from under us when we discover the closet Jerry is coming out of is located in an alternative universe where the main controversial horror is Loving Opera. The hilarious, hard-hitting script provides the troubled son and his hysterical mom with attitudes that mirror present-day anti-gay arguments and rhetoric. The satire is deepened by the fact that a disagreement about Maria Callas between Jerry and another opera lover from his support group has resulted in the man's corpse being stuffed under Jerry's living room carpet. But that's a situation Jerry and Mom both regard as little more than a minor inconvenience compared to the burning issue of opera addiction. Widespread laughter and outbursts of enthusiastic applause made it clear that at this first B Night of the festival *The Rug* was audience favorite.

I liked it a lot but my personal favorite of the evening was Mike McGeever's poignant and enigmatic *Frameworks*. Marie (Camille Russell), an intense and brainy university science major, misses her subway train and tries to avoid the puzzling advances, questions and comments of a strange man named Gabe (Scott Kravitz) who's the only other person on the platform. She is puzzled that, with no evident local academic qualifications, Gabe seems to know more than makes sense not only about her field of study—physics—but about her name and identity. Is he an over-educated pervert coming onto her for sex? or some self-taught nut-case obsessed with quantum physics and the theory of relativity? Questions move by unanswered, mysteries multiply, and not just for onstage characters at Center Stage, Santa Cruz.

The humanist implications of quantum physics and the theory of relativity are subjects Mike McGeever writes about with Stoppardesque confidence. Their far reaching realities intrigue but still baffle me. But I took heart on Saturday when it began to look as if a healthy diet of doubt and mystery was part of what *Frameworks* was driving at. Gabe kept implying that in life as in science you need to keep reframing what you think you know in a way that makes you see it from a whole new angle. And just to prove his point, in the final seconds of the action, everything moved out of scientific speculation into the realm of supernatural faith, familiar superstition or provocative possibility, depending on your point of view.

I like plays that raise questions you're still asking yourself instead of knowing all about it as you drive home and *Frameworks* is one of them.

B Night 2019 begins and ends with two intimate, focused pieces, each about how a pair of closely connected people face up to the deep differences in their personalities and attitudes. In Simon Hunt's *ReRun* uptight bookish and cultured Sean (neatly acted by Nic Terbeek) challenges younger brother Tim (a strident yet sympathetic Eli McMilin) about his "so what?" addiction to comic books and video games. They bicker, accuse and justify, find some previously unsuspected nuances and decide to continue agreeing to disagree. In the quiet, elegiac *What's Left Over*, an unnamed man and woman sit on a park bench and reflect on the peaks and pitfalls of their long relationship. Calm and still affectionate, they agree it's time to end their marriage. True to Eileen Valentino Flaxman's text, Avondina Wills and Sarah Cruse bring a satisfying evening to a close on a note of a calm assurance free of any hint of tear jerking or sentimentality.

The festival continues through February 3rd.

Photo by Jana Marcus

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