

Review: Lab Theater founder shines in "Divorce"



Charles Runnells, crunnells@news-press.com 12:08 a.m. EST November 14, 2014



(Photo: Special to The News-Press)

Annette Trossbach pokes her head out from backstage, nervously eyeballs the audience and then quickly retreats from view.

Her character is terrified of performing, it seems.

But Trossbach doesn't escape that easily, and some unseen stage manager rudely shoves her back onto the stage and into the spotlight. So, resigned, she decides she might as well just go ahead and perform.

And, believe me, that's a good thing.

Laboratory Theater audiences don't get to see the community theater's founder perform often. She acted last season in a Theatre Conspiracy production, but this marks her first time onstage at Lab. When she does act, though, it's well worth seeing.

In this case, Trossbach brings her considerable talents to the one-woman show "My Brilliant Divorce." And she energizes the Geraldine Aron comedy with ample humor, self-effacing charm and an impressive arsenal of funny voices from a stuffy British husband to her mother's Irish brogue to a partially paralyzed divorce attorney who talks out of the side of his mouth.

"My Brilliant Divorce" is, of course, about a divorce. In this case, Trossbach's lovably neurotic, middle-aged Angela has just split from her husband "Roundhead," who's busy cavorting with a 25-year-old Latina that Angela calls "the Spanish-speaking embryo."

From there, Angela recounts four years of her post-divorce life from her initial split to her humiliating experience buying a vibrator to dating to finding a job to an unlikely ending that suggests she might just find happiness again, after all.

Trossbach plays Angela with fidgety nervousness, angst, lighthearted sarcasm and lots of energy. She easily captivates your attention from start to finish in this two-act play, whether she's lying about her age (and even her dog's age) or flirting pathetically with the guy who answers a suicide help line.

Trossbach and director John McKerrow tell their story with a wonderfully loose, conversational tone. And by the end of "Divorce," you've fallen in love with Angela and her quirky ways.

I just wish Trossbach showed more of the anger and sadness beneath Angela's bravely smiling face. It would have added more depth to "Divorce." Plus I wanted her supporting characters to be less cartoonish and more believable — a problem, I'm sure, that comes from a script that uses those characters as thinly veiled excuses to do silly, stereotypical ethnic accents.

Those are minor complaints, however. "My Brilliant Divorce" still delivers many fun, memorable and even emotional scenes. I don't think I'll ever forget Angela's hilariously awkward attempt at sex with a well-endowed man on a chaise lounge. Or her recurring fantasy about being carried up a staircase by a man in a cable-knit sweater. Or a funny bit at the therapist's office involving Barbie and Ken dolls.

Angela might have a case of stagefright. But Trossbach? She has nothing at all to be shy about.

Connect with this reporter: Charles Runnells (News-Press) (Facebook) @charlesrunnells (Twitter)

If You Go

- **What:** Lab Theater's "My Brilliant Divorce"
- **When:** Now through Nov. 22. 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday.
- **Where:** The Laboratory Theater of Florida, 1634 Woodford Ave., downtown Fort Myers
- **Tickets:** \$22 (\$12 for students)
- **Info:** 218-0481 or laboratorytheaterflorida.com

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