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Laboratory Theater says, 'I do,' 'I do'

ARTS COMMENTARY

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When it comes down to it, it's all about love.

The nine short one-act plays at the Laboratory Theater of Florida are full of countless little gestures of affection: holding hands, remembering to pack what the other forgot when going on a trip, how-we-first-met stories, standing side by side in front of the bathroom mirror while getting ready in the morning, knowing how to fight in a healthy way, appreciating the fact that he doesn't snore.

But the plays are also full of other things: pain at being rejected by one's parents and thrown out of the house at 15, being bullied and attacked, being unable to marry the person you love.

"Standing on Ceremony: The Gay Marriage Plays" looks at same-sex marriage through a variety of lenses. Conceived by Brian Shnipper, the nine plays are written by eight of our top contemporary playwrights, including Moises Kaufman, Mo Gaffney, Neil LaBute and Paul Rudnick, whose two offerings get some of the biggest laughs of the evening.

Mr. Rudnick's humor is razor-sharp in "The Gay Agenda," in which Mary Abigail Carstairs-Sweetbuckle of [Ohio](#) (Lori Riti) gives a talk about seeing gays everywhere. She starts out all smiles and Midwestern sweetness, but slowly builds to a public meltdown as she relays her tale. (Her husband, she says, claims that Satan made gay people as a crafts project.)

Ms. Riti is priceless in this short play, revealing how she began hearing a gay voice talk to her. Her comedic timing and delivery are on target and do justice to Mr. Ruddick's lines.



Stacy Stauffer and Kendra Price COURTESY PHOTOS

In "My Husband," Nancy Antonio plays a liberal mother desperate to marry off her gay son (PJ McCready). She sees marriage as a competition, and wants her son to have a wedding that's "bigger and gayer" than any other.



Annette Trossbach and Brenda Kensler

Stacy Stauffer and Kendra Price play a couple in two different plays, "This Flight Tonight" and "A Traditional Wedding." In the first, they're about to fly to [Des Moines, Iowa](#), for their wedding when one starts to have second thoughts. In the latter, Ms. Price's character explains why she didn't want to have a conventional wedding. The two have some tender moments together on stage as they work out their differences.

"Pretty soon we'll be as bad at marriage as the straight folk are.

Then we'll know we've achieved equality," jokes Ms. Stauffer's character.

"On Facebook," a re-enactment of a Facebook conversation performed as a reading, doesn't really work that well as a short play, but does contain some good acting.

Ms. Stauffer plays a no-nonsense lesbian, while Ms. Price's character is a judgmental conservative who doesn't think gays should be allowed to marry, all the while insisting her gay friends love her. A shirtless Josh Russo is eye candy while Ms. Antonio provides laughs as Beth, a woman who's totally clueless about technology.

In "London Mosquitoes," David Yudowitz gives a eulogy for his partner of 46 years. It's moving and

Where's the story?



6 Points Mentioned

poignant, but would've been better served if Mr. sYudowitz had used more dramatic modulations in his delivery.

"London Mosquitoes" is an intimate view of a relationship that lasted almost 50 years, one that got "easier and lovelier" as the years passed. But it's also a tribute to those of an earlier era, the pioneers, a generation we're now losing one by one.

His character stresses the importance of witnessing each other's lives — and their deaths.

But it's "Strange Fruit" that packs the most emotional wallop, with Scott Carpenter and Mr. McCready giving side-by-side monologues as a newlywed couple. Mr. McCready's almost unbearably sweet as he describes coming out later in life and discovering he really does love men. And Mr. Carpenter's character is the lucky recipient; he's charming and wry, in love with the whole world on his wedding day. You can't help but fall in love with both their characters.

"Standing On Ceremony" opens with a couple (Dave Kensler and Mr. Carpenter) grappling with writing their own wedding vows and ends with another couple saying theirs. But the last play of the evening is unfortunately one of the weakest, with Pablo (Joey Bostic) and Andrew (John Klinko) saying their self-penned wedding vows at the altar. (Mr. Bostic performs as Ariana Valentine around the [Lee County](#) area.) So while the show ends on a celebratory note, it also just fizzles out, as the actors seem challenged by the poetic and whimsical dialogue. We're finally presented with an actual wedding scene, but it feels oddly anti-climatic.

Director Brenda Kensler chose to decorate the minimalist set with a wall of white cubes with words such as doubt, fear, sad, bullying and name calling written on them. The actors remove a cube or two after each short play, revealing more of the rainbow flag behind it. But it just feels gimmicky, making the plays seem more like a high-school production. The writing — and some of the acting — is of such a high quality that it doesn't need those cubes. Their presence doesn't enhance the plays at all.

"Standing on Ceremony" doesn't preach like an "After School Special," but it does manage to deliver some nice messages, such as, "It's OK to be who you are."

Forty-five years after Stonewall, that historic pivotal event in [New York City](#) in which gays fought back against police mistreatment, their marriage is now legal in 19 states and [Washington, D.C.](#)

At the rate laws are changing, perhaps "Standing on Ceremony" will soon be a dated piece.

As one character says, "If marriage is about love, why do we want to reduce love in the world?"

A good question, indeed. |

'Standing on Ceremony: The Gay Marriage Plays'

>> When: through July 26

>> Where: Laboratory Theater of Florida, 1634

Woodford Ave., Fort Myers

>> Tickets: \$22 (\$12 for students)

>> Info: 218-0481 or www.laboratorytheaterflorida.com

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- Incisional hernia - the intestine protrudes through the abdominal wall at the site of previous abdominal surgery.
- Femoral hernia - occurs when the intestine enters the canal carrying the femoral artery into the upper thigh.
- Umbilical hernia - part of the small intestine passes through the abdominal wall near the navel.



• Hiatal hernia - happens when the upper stomach squeezes through the hiatus, an opening in the diaphragm through which the esophagus passes.

Ultimately, all hernias are caused by a combination of pressure and an opening or weakness of muscle or fascia. The pressure pushes an organ or tissue through the opening or weak spot.

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