

Lab Theater preaches to the (gay) choir



Charles Runnells, crunnells@news-press.com 12:10 a.m. EDT July 18, 2014



(Photo: special to the news-press)

Gay marriage is serious business, judging from the heated social-media discussions and the issue's frequent appearances in newspapers and TV news broadcasts.

But you know what? It can also be very funny. Especially in the hands of The Laboratory Theater of Florida.

The community-theater company pokes fun at gay marriage and changing marriage laws in its new political comedy "Standing on Ceremony: The Gay Marriage Plays." And everything is fair game here, from lesbians who (allegedly) like power tools to opinionated Facebook friends to the coded meaning of "family values" to what newly married gay men should call each other (husband? partner?).

Depending on which side of the wedding aisle you fall — pro or con — you'll either be laughing your head off or heading straight for the door. "The Gay Marriage Plays" is hardly an unbiased look at the issue, and the "con" side is usually portrayed as buffoonish and clueless. One chirpy character claims she's well-informed and gets all of her news from "FOX News, USA TODAY and The Christian Science Monitor."

But if you're pro gay marriage — and count me in that category, please — you'll find plenty to love in this series of nine mini plays by well-known playwrights such as Paul Rudnick, Mo Gaffney and Moises Kaufman. Even if they're only preaching to the (gay) choir.

Sure, some plays work better than others. An inspired idea about a Facebook chat gone wrong starts out strong but quickly overstays its welcome — although Kendra Price and Nancy Antonio are very funny as an obnoxious commenter and her technologically confused mom.

And "The Gay Marriage Plays" has a few other issues, too. Some of these community-theater actors are better than others. The politics can get a bit heavy-handed. And a few of the plays are a little too similar to each other (it is a very narrow topic, after all).

But even the so-so plays are at least mildly amusing and sometimes even enlightening. Director Brenda Kensler keeps things lighthearted and fast-paced. And when these plays do work, they're downright terrific.

Take, for example, Dave Kensler and Scott Carpenter as an endearing gay couple painstakingly writing vows for their civil-union ceremony (instead of "lawfully married," they opt for "lawfully domestic partnered").

Or Antonio as a gung ho woman who pressures her gay son — an amusingly flustered PJ McCready — into getting married so she can "out-gay" her trendy liberal friends.

Or Lori Riti as Mary Abigail Carstairs-Sweetbuckle, a cheerfully opinionated woman giving a speech on "the gay agenda" that grows increasingly unhinged. She starts out talking about her new gay neighbors, but that quickly veers into the snarky "gay voice" she hears in her head and how everyone she knows is gay now. Even Ricky Martin!

And then there's perhaps the most touching moment here: David Yudowitz as an elderly gay man giving a eulogy for his dead partner of 46 years. The way Yudowitz tenderly pats the wooden casket will break your heart.

All these stories take place in front of a backdrop of stacked white cubes emblazoned with negative words such as "FEAR," "TEASING" and "HATECRIME." The actors slowly restack the cubes throughout the show until — about 90 minutes later (no intermission) — all those hateful words are gone and replaced by pure, virginal white.

All that, plus audiences get to eat some actual wedding cake after the show's wedding-ceremony finale (with Joey Bostic and John Klink spooling off some impressively hyper-verbal wedding vows). It's not a bad way to end a show, no matter what your political leanings!

If You Go

• **What:** "Standing on Ceremony: The Gay Marriage Plays"

• **Where:** The Laboratory Theater of Florida, 1634 Woodford Ave., downtown Fort Myers

• **When:** 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays through July 26.

• **Tickets:** \$20 (\$12 for students)

• **Info:** 218-0481 or laboratorytheaterflorida.com

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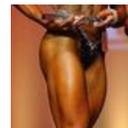


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