

Review: Lab Theater finds the laughs in adultery

CHARLES RUNNELLS, CRUNNELLS@NEWS-PRESS.COM 3:48 p.m. EDT March 19, 2015



(Photo: special to the news-press)

Hurray for adultery!

That might as well be the message in Lab Theater's "Same Time, Next Year." The 1975 Bernard Slade play practically created a new genre: The romantic adultery comedy.

And these are two of the nicest cheaters you're likely to meet onstage.

James Recca's accountant George starts out likably nervous and neurotic after a night of passion ("My wife is going to KILL me!"), but he grows confident and comfortable as the years pass from 1951 to 1975.

Meanwhile, Tammy Richardson's easygoing housewife Doris has a sly, winning smile and a playful sense of humor that quickly wins you over (and George too, obviously).

Together, this extramarital couple meets once a year for a romantic rendezvous at a Northern California guest cottage. They have sex, of course — sometimes three times in a row! — but they also share family photos, problems and whatever else is happening in their lives. They even have a rule: They must tell one good story and one bad story about their respective spouses, whom they insist they still love despite the cheating.

Director Scott Carpenter keeps things lighthearted and warm, and he takes his time building the romance and the relationship between the two lovers.

I just wish there was more romantic chemistry onstage. Recca and Richardson have some very funny scenes together, but I rarely believed their passion — a critical flaw in any romantic comedy.

Part of that problem is a notable difference in acting chops onstage. Richardson is fine enough as Doris: She's calm and adorable with some crackerjack comedic timing. But she's often outshined by Recca's warm, nuanced and thoroughly natural performance. And while her character changes physically over the years — thanks partly to a succession of not entirely convincing wigs — she can't quite bring enough change to her actual performance.

Recca's George, meanwhile, progresses dramatically over these 25 years without the help of wigs or much make-up. It's all in the acting. Some of his earlier, neurotic episodes remind me of Woody Allen. But later, George is angry and brittle sometimes, polished and confident other times. And through body language and his changing demeanor, you can really feel the passage of time.

Recca is also very funny. George's reaction to Doris' surprise pregnancy in Act 1 is priceless (in fact, both actors are funny in what's probably the best scene in the play).

Another issue: The long downtime between the show's six scenes. Carpenter uses radio news broadcasts to entertain the audience and prepare them for the time jump, and that helps somewhat. But the show's first scene change takes at least 2 minutes as the stagehand scurries around updating Lois Kuehne's quaint cottage set with new bedspreads and other details.

That speed gets better later in the play, but a second stagehand would have done wonders in moving things along and keeping the momentum going.

Even with these issues, I still enjoyed "Same Time, Next Year's" charming characters and witty banter.

Go see it with your wife or husband. Or, you know, someone else.

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If you go

•**What:** "Same Time, Next Year"

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

•**When:** Now through March 28. Performances are 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday with one 2 p.m. matinee this Sunday.

•**Tickets:** \$22 (\$12 for students)

•**Info:** 218-0481 or laboratorytheaterflorida.com (<http://laboratorytheaterflorida.com/>)

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