

Lucy Harris tickles Victorian funny bones in Lab Theater's "In the Next Room, or the Vibrator Play"

By CHRIS SILK

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FORT MYERS — Some of the funniest moments in the Laboratory Theater of Florida's production of "In the Next Room, or the Vibrator Play" come when patients (male and female) experience the doctor's marvelous machine. Yes, it's really a vibrator. The dawn of the age of electricity brings many marvels...

Sarah Ruhl's sharp, witty play explores both the early history of the vibrator - when doctors used the instrument to treat "hysteria" - and themes like motherhood, loneliness, jealousy and sexual desire.

Lucy Harris plays Catherine Givings, the lively, passionate wife of Dr. Givings (played with wonderful disdain by Timothy Gunderman), who has an interest in his patients and in the wondrous healing powers of electricity - but none for her.

"Catherine is very curious about the machine and tries throughout the show to inspect this unusual machine," Harris said.

For much of the first act, Harris listens through the walls, peeks through keyholes and tries various methods to satisfy her insatiable curiosity about the machine. One of the play's most amusing moments comes when Catherine Givings and one of the doctor's patients, played by Laura Nin, pick the lock to the operating theatre and "have a go" at the machine themselves.

For the actress though, the story goes beyond the laughs that come with the vibrator.

"This is more a love story than a story about vibrators," she said. "The real story you will come away with is that of Dr. and Mrs. Givings. This is a couple who loves each other very much but they do not know how to express it."

The show features period Victorian costumes in an array of jewel tones, including corsets, petticoats, bloomers and bustles. Ruhl dives into issues surrounding the dawn of the age of electricity as well as women's sexuality.

"Things were quite different in the Victorian age ... but also much the same," Harris said. "My character is educated but is very curious about life outside of her home. I imagine how it would be, as a woman, not to have the information at my finger tips the

way I do now."

As she struggles to ignite the passion in her marriage, Catherine Givings turns to the men who troop through her parlor - patients and husbands of patients. Harris and her castmates slice through Ruhl's innuendo-laden dialogue with glee.

"She is very passionate," Harris said of her character. "The show has a stellar cast and is very funny. We crack each other up constantly.

"In the Next Room, or the Vibrator Play" plays at 8 p.m. Wednesday - Saturday at the Laboratory Theater of Florida in downtown Fort Myers. Tickets are \$20. Call 239-218-0481 or online at laboratorytheaterflorida.com.



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