

'Moose Mating' looks at human dating

By Nicole Krueger
Entertainment Editor

They meet. Attraction. They date. Love. They move in together. Sex. They argue. Bitterness. And it all happens in about an hour and a half.

Sounds like love in the '90s, doesn't it?

Actually, it's the west coast premier of David Grae's *Moose Mating*, Lord Leebrick Theatre Company's latest production. Directed by Chris Pinto, *Moose Mating* is a modern play about, well, love in the '90s.

The play begins when Michael and Betsy run into each other at a play in New York. They are instantly attracted to each other, and the audience witnesses the chemistry between the two as they flirt with each other and exchange cheesy cliches and pick-up lines. They then proceed to pursue a relationship, with the assistance of Lonnie and Josie, their respective friends and romantic advisers.

Grae effectively adapts Shakespeare's dialogue-mixed-with-monologue-plus-a-narrator playwriting style to quickly guide the audience through the various stages of the couple's relationship and to give viewers a glimpse into the minds of the characters. This style works well, as Michael and Betsy confide to the audience their thoughts, fears and insecurities, which they keep hidden from each other.

The play, which both portrays and parodies the paranoia of modern dating rituals, rings true — a little *too* true. Both of the main characters are easy to identify with, as are their actions, behavior and motives. Their first date, shown in a series of "slides" featuring "dialogue bubbles" that betray their true thoughts, is one that most of us have probably been on — possibly more than once.

As a romantic comedy, *Moose Mating* falls a little flat. It is amusing and enjoyable, but it earned little more than a few chuckles from me. A few good comic lines stand out, but the rest is more cute than it is funny. (This may merely be a matter of generation, however, as some of the more middle-



Cast members are Susan Browning Burns, Christopher Leebrick, Paul Rhoden and Renee Morrison (clockwise from upper left).

aged audience members seemed to find the play hilarious.)

The acting started out a little stiff and forced, but once the cast members relaxed into their roles the dialogue became much more natural. Renee Morrison and Paul Rhoden hold the play together as Betsy and Michael, delivering good, steady performances.

They are outshone, however, by Christopher Leebrick as Lonnie and Susan Browning Burns as Josie.

Leebrick and Burns provide most of the comic relief with their vivid, energetic, don't-let-him/her-know-you-like-him/her characters.

Lonnie's comparison between human dating and moose mating rituals provides the play with its theme and title, and Leebrick plays the offbeat, blissfully obnoxious character with relish. His Lonnie is both annoying and likeable, and the energy Leebrick brings to the role keeps the

play from growing stagnant.

Likewise, Burns is excellent in the role of the dating-savvy Josie, who coaches Betsy at the game. Her New York accent is strong and appealing, and it adds a "Saturday Night Live" flavor to the play.

Justin Guadagni is not to be overlooked as the narrator. Without him, the play would lose much of the humor and sarcasm he delivers through his lines. The live musicians, who provide mood music, accent the plot along, also deserve applause.

Altogether, *Moose Mating* is an amusing and insightful exploration of relationships and dating rituals in the '90s. It is based upon a premise that most people should be able to identify with, and it is presented in an unusual manner. Although not uproariously funny, for \$12 Friday and Saturday and \$9 Thursday through Sunday, the play is definitely worth seeing.

The production will continue May 30-31, June 5-7 and 12-14 at Lord Leebrick Theatre Company. For tickets or more information, call the theater at 465-1506 or the Hult Center at 682-5000.

REVIEW

Moose Mating

★★★
(great acting, true-to-life script)

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■ **WHEN:** May 30-31, June 5-7 and 12-14

■ **COST:** \$12 Friday and Saturday, \$9 Thursday-Sunday

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