

'Sylvia' opens at Clackamas

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MATT ROWNING



A dog humps, shits, eats trash, licks where you don't want it to and bites. Despite the lack of prefrontal cortex in these four legged hairballs, we humans can't seem to get enough of them. Perhaps we keep them because dogs love so unequivocally and ungrudgingly.

In Clackamas Community College's production of *Sylvia*, Sam Levi's character Greg, a middle aged stock trader, finds this dog brand of love to be more fulfilling than his wife's. The play explores the relationships between man and dog, man and wife and man and world by making great use of an anthropomorphic, English speaking dog, *Sylvia*.

Sylvia the dog was played by Molly Bowman, who took loving care to her

role. Reminiscent of FXX's *Wilfred*, Bowman carries on conversation with both Greg and his wife Katie throughout the play. As Greg's dog, her stupidity incites of all the play's man vs. wife tension.

Later on, *Sylvia* becomes an impartor of wisdom to Greg and Katie, offering sagely advice to both. Having opposing personality traits written into a character is a difficult challenge for an actor or actress, but Bowman did it well.

Coupled with the physical challenges of the role (crawling, jumping, running and humping houseguests vigorously), *Sylvia* was perfectly played by Bowman. The entire gimmick of the play is this speaking dog, and if not for a sturdy

actress cast in this role, the work would fall apart.

The roles of Tim, Phyllis and Leslie were all played by one actor, Colin Stewart. Tim is a stoner biker of sorts: a macho dog owner in the park. Phyllis is an uptight middle aged alcoholic and Katie's best friend. Leslie is Greg and Katie's androgynous therapist with an anger issue. He did a good job switching between the three distinct roles. Though each of the characters he played were rather one dimensional, Stewart played to his own strengths: enjoying and reveling in his characters' own shallow mindedness.

If *Sylvia* had issues, they mostly fell to A.R Gurney's script. I'm not squeamish, however, some parts of the show might make one's stomach

flip. Gurney doesn't shy away from the gross out jokes. *Sylvia* jokes about her anal gland being squeezed and "fucking the shit out of" Tim's dog Bowser, just to name two out of a vast pool of on-the-edge humor. I always enjoy a few toilet jokes, but be aware that this play may not be for your six-year-old daughter.

The four actors and their director Jim Eikrem did a great job staging *Sylvia*. The technical aspects of the play were also well run, so kudos to Chris Whitten and the technical crew. As I said in my review of *Ain't Misbehavin'*, if I don't think about the technical aspects of a show, I believe they were done well.

Sylvia runs in Niemeyer Center Theater through Nov. 22.



Sylvia, Greg and Katie face off at the end of Act 1.