

Steven Mandell and
Becky Croson-LaChapelle
in *Barefoot in the Park*,
Very Little Theatre.



CLIFF COLES

Is Love Enough?

Simon's classic *Barefoot in the Park* explores marriage.

One of Neil Simon's early plays, 1960 comedy *Barefoot in the Park*, offers a glimpse into the mindset of the times for which it was written. In our modern age of two-income families, the notion of a wife staying home to "play house" while the husband goes off to the salt mines seems disproportionately quaint, and if you've ever viewed old reruns of "Bewitched" you'll wonder if anybody was ever sober, because every situation called for a drink.

Drinking was the socially accepted panacea of the times and Neil Simon's *Barefoot*, in which the couple's bar is the centerpiece of the living room, reflects that attitude. Still, dated as it is, it taps into a common theme, one that just about everyone can relate to — newlyweds experiencing that inexorably dismal moment when they discover that the honeymoon is over.

The play opens in an empty New York brownstone apartment — five floors up if you don't count the stoop — that the newly wedded Corie, a perky, impetuous young bride has rented at a bargain price. Corie's husband, Paul, a conservative, buttoned-down lawyer, is less than thrilled with her choice of living space when he discovers, after climbing all those stairs, that the bathroom has no bathtub, a twin size bed fills the entire space of the minuscule bedroom, all the fixtures work in reverse — sometimes — and blasts of cold winter air blow through a hole in the skylight. Adding to the building's charm are the neighbors, who

embody an odd mix of wacky eccentrics. The most notable is Victor Velasco, a playfully flamboyant scoundrel who uses the couple's bedroom window to climb up the outside ledge to his loft apartment above theirs.

Before they've even settled in, Corie's lonely, acquiescent mother, Ethel, makes a surprise visit, which inspires Corie to arrange a little matchmaking by way of a double date designed to bring Ethel and Victor Velasco together. The date sets the stage for an evening of multiple surprises and events, among them Ethel's life-altering reawakening, as well as events that underscore the disparity between Paul and Corie, leaving them to ponder their future together and question whether love in itself is truly enough to sustain a marriage.

Carrie Ann Lane is sweetly earnest as the gregarious Corie. At the beginning of the play, Lane's performance seemed a bit stilted, but as the play progressed, she seemed to catch her rhythm and started having fun with the role. Likewise, Jef A. Robertson is convincing and aptly cast as the stoic Paul. His exasperated demeanor nicely contrasts with Lane's exuberance. Becky Croson-LaChapelle is delightfully funny and over the top as Ethel, and Steven Mandell lends a campy slant to his role as the unconventional Victor Velasco. Rounding out the cast is Rick J. Lloyd as the telephone repairman and Don Moyer as the delivery man.

Barefoot in the Park runs at Very Little Theatre through June 19. **CW**

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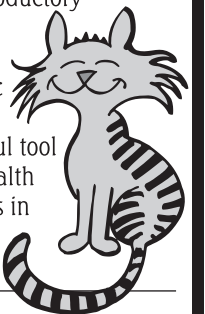
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