

A Glitch in Time

Communicating Doors offers old-fashioned farce with a temporal twist

Since the dawn of philosophical inquisition, the question of time — and, more specifically, time travel — has been the sticky caramel center inside the bite-sized chocolate of conceptual contemplation. Everyone, from St. Augustine to stoned sophomores, has wondered: What is time? And what would happen if I went back in time and, say, killed my parents?

Such quandaries are no less intellectually stimulating for being physically impossible; they are also, when you think on it, quite hilarious, which explains the titillation to be found in British playwright Alan Ayckbourn's time-jumping farce, *Communicating Doors*, now at the Very Little Theatre.

Directed by Karen Scheeland, *Communicating Doors* is, for all its homicidal panic and theoretic flapdoodle, a very brisk and lighthearted romp — something along the lines of Oscar Wilde meets Rod Serling, with a little *Back to the Future* thrown in for erotic zest. The plot is a cat's cradle woven of Silly Putty; the story jumps forward and back, in 20-year increments, between the years 2014 and 1974, as various characters are transported into ever more absurd situations by means of a magic vestibule in a hotel suite.

At the crux of this temporal turnstile is Poopay, aka Phoebe (Leslie Murray), a "special sex consultant" whose john, Reece (Michael Walker), seeks an unexpected form of release — he wants

to confess rather than undress, to dump on her rather than hump on her. It turns out Reece, like some latter-day Bluebeard, has murdered a couple of wives, first Jessica (Naomi Ruiz-Todd) and then Ruella (Kathy James LaMontagne).

This information recasts Poopay in the role of sleuth, as she repeatedly trips through time in an effort to save lives, untangle her own identity and discover what the deal is with Reece's malignantly unctuous business partner, Julian (Michael P. Watkins). Trailing Poopay in her pursuit of the truth is Harold, the bumbling house detective (Achilles Massahos).

Unlike the *Terminator* movies, where time is traversed to save humanity, nothing much is at stake in *Communicating Doors*. Shakespeare used mistaken identity and mixed messages to boost his comic enterprise, and Ayckbourn's time machine is similarly just a device in the service of plot twists and punch lines. And that's fine. Peel back the sci-fi conceit, and you'll find an old-fashioned farce, full of bawdy repartee, promiscuous pratfalls and lots of tick-tock wordplay.

Communicating Doors is a solid piece of crowd pleasing — silly but not insubstantial, frolicsome without being forgettable. There are worse ways to waste your time. — Rick Levin

Communicating Doors plays through Oct. 29 at the Very Little Theatre; for times and tickets, visit TheVLT.com or call 344-7751.

Nazis and Jazz Hands

Cabaret pushes the envelope on sex, glitz & tyranny

Opening to shocked audiences in 1966, *Cabaret* was one of the first musicals to combine social commentary with song and dance. Set amid the intra-war turmoil in Weimar Germany, the characters drink, dance and have fun while around them the Nazis ascend to power. Stuffed with razzle-dazzle dance numbers and seedy sexuality, *Cabaret* is simultaneously entertaining and uncomfortable, drawing you in and then smacking you with your own compliance.

Director Peg Major obviously appreciates the richness and nuance of this difficult script. There are a number of small details that elevate her production. Fe02's set is a succulent red and gold, art nouveau-inspired masterpiece. Major has chosen to cast women of myriad shapes and sizes for the Kit Kat Klub girls, and the realness of these women lends a vivid, earthy feel to their overtly sexual dance numbers.

Speaking of vivid, earthy sexuality, Ecaterina Lynn sings the deep alto of Sally Bowles with electricity; the

audience literally leaned forward as she belted out "Life is a Cabaret." Kory Weimer is magnetically creepy as the Master of Ceremonies, moving easily from simple, silly songs like "Two Ladies" to the morally obscene "If You Could See Her." And Tracy Nygard brings an interesting complexity to the sailor-seducing Fraulein Kost.

Supporting these performers is a vocally strong ensemble. Unfortunately, however, some of the actors seemed to be performing in an entirely different play than the one Major has envisioned. Pacing drags at times, and I had the urge to set a quicker metronome just behind the curtain to speed things up.

If you haven't seen *Cabaret* (and no, the film doesn't count), take this opportunity — it's a fascinating play. Hopefully, those performers who didn't seem on board opening night will warm up as the run continues. Just don't expect to get comfortable in your seat. — Anna Grace

Cabaret runs 8pm Friday-Saturday and 2:30pm Sunday through Nov. 6, at Cottage Theatre in Cottage Grove; info and tickets at cottage theatre.org or 541-942-8001.

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