

Love Language

Eugene gets a dose of *The Real Thing*



Dan Pegoda and Sarah Papineau in *The Real Thing*

"**T**ouch me," the political-activist actress entreats the playwright, just after his wife exits to make a dip for the crudités. These words set the story spinning like a '60s love song on old vinyl — something real and clichéd at once, exploring the delicate, powerful balance of love.

Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing* is a delicious feast of words, the best conversation you've ever eavesdropped on. Talky, yes, and if you want helicopters landing on stage this is not your play. But Stoppard is so masterful that most people don't fuss about the unfolding plot; they just want to bathe in the language.

Stoppard, whose works include *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Travesties*, set out to write about love: real, complicated, grown-up love. Layering scenes through a series of conversations, he examines the thoughtless expressions of care, lust, vanity, hope and self-protection that surround love.

And in case the complication of emotional commitment doesn't feel real enough, director Fred Gorelick stages the play in the round — or in the square, actually. The audience is granted a seat on the edge of Stoppard's fictional living room and invited to peer in. Gorelick blocks his actors like a master chess player, providing all the voyeuristic pleasure of a round with none of the annoying sight problems.

Dan Pegoda delivers an enthralling performance as playwright Henry, a wizard of words who can coddle, convince or cut down anyone in his midst. This production absolutely rests on Pegoda's shoulders, and he carries it as easily as a sack of feathers. The way he breezes through the verbiage

is a pleasure to behold, but look deeper: Watch for the way his character listens to others, and listens differently in different situations. Pegoda's physical movements alone can hold an entire conversation while urbane nonsense pours from his mouth.

This magical performance is well complimented by the remaining cast. Sarah Papineau rocks the fabulous role of Annie, playing not only Henry's beloved actress (complicated enough) but also the characters in his plays. Storm Kennedy also delivers as Henry's original wife Charlotte, the one woman capable of out-wording the playwright, although his daughter (Shannon McNally) is working on it. Russell Dyball is a sweetly naive Max, reacting honestly to the storms raging around him.

Some of the tertiary characters lack this same sense of authenticity, and their funny lines and roles as plot movers inspire a cartoonish portrayal. Dale Light and Colin Gray are fine actors, and the consistency in their manner suggests an intentional conspiracy on the part of the director and writer. That choice was hard for me to dig, after so much was done so well.

This carnival of words is set in Britain, and could have been ruined by the poorly managed accents Eugene is asked to tolerate in so many plays. No one here slacks on the speech, however, and the clipped British tongue slips so smoothly you scarcely notice.

A brilliant script, clear direction and some of the finest acting you'll see in town, this production is *The Real Thing*. — Anna Grace

The Real Thing runs through Feb. 4 at Lord Leebrick Theatre; lordleebrick.com or 465-1506.

This Side of the Tracks

All the trailer park's a stage in ACE's latest musical

Raunchy, underdeveloped, oversexed and aesthetically topsy-turvy, *The Great American Trailer Park Musical* is a piece of sideshow freakery on the order of John Waters' *Desperate Living*. It's a prankish mish-mash of attitudes, styles and music, and — peopled by potty mouths, crotch scratchers, dick grabbers and slut buckets — it's certainly not for the prudes of political correctness. This show is as off-color as it is off Broadway.

If your yardstick of tolerance was defined when Divine nosed on a freshly shat dog turd in *Pink Flamingos*, you should have no problem with Actors Cabaret of Eugene's *The Great American Trailer Park Musical*. This uneven but ultimately infectious production is at once defiantly crass and completely harmless: a comedy of bad manners that errs just this hitch of mean-spiritedness, while never quite achieving the zing of class satire or the emotional ranginess of romantic comedy. *Trailer Park*, in other words, is more Winter's Boner than *Winter's Bone*, more Poop Floats than *Hope Floats*.

Set amid the out-and-proudly poor denizens of Armadillo Acres, a white-trash hood of double-wides in Stark, Florida,

this nasty little musical — ably directed by ACE stalwart Mark Van Beever (*Spring Awakening*), from a book by Betsy Kelso and music/lyrics by David Nehls — is as loose and baggy as a pair of size-XXL overalls.

In its own hillbilly fashion, *Trailer Park* does fulfill the Shakespearean dictates of comedy, but the thin narrative of betrayal, awakening and love's labor lost-and-found is simply a device for mounting a series of sketch comedy routines. These episodes are strung together by music that taps the vein of second-wave country, from foot-stomping honky-tonk to the outlaw styles of Waylon and Willie, with a bit of '70s Motown thrown into the mix.

The songs are uniformly strong and often hilariously clever. The only quirk is the volume on stage, which is set far too low, creating a double-edge sonic snag by 1) being, well, too quiet and, 2) causing the occasional flat notes during vocal solos. Turn it up, ACE!

Trailer Park, as it exists on the page, is an unholy mess. From scene to scene, and sometimes even within a single scene, the show seems uncertain about its intentions: Parody one moment, social commentary the next; sexual farce, slapstick, straight-



Laura Holden (left), Sophie Mitchell and Megan Hammon in ACE's *Trailer Park*

up (as opposed to half-mast) romance; a satire on lipstick (or perhaps "tube-top") feminism, class bigotry or — as when Jeannie (Shannon Coltrane) winks at the forth wall by announcing, "I think I feel a dream sequence coming on" — a hoipolloi postmodern deconstruction of cultural clichés and the stereotypes of poverty.

None of which matters, really, because ACE, with its cozy, dinner-show setting, has cornered the local market on creating intimate, engaging productions that — even when the subject is heavy — take the *community* in community theater seriously. The goal is to have fun.

And *Trailer Park*'s strong, dedicated cast of young actors certainly makes fun look fun. There's not the space to note them all, but a special nod goes out to the same actor who damn near stole *Spring Awakening*, Sophie Mitchell (Pickles) as well as Coltrane, who plays the agoraphobic wife of philandering Norbert (Andrew Gutoski). These two charismatic performers prove themselves masters of that dying art called physical comedy. Lucille Ball didn't live in a trailer park, but if she had, I bet she'd have given her "left tit for a dip in the pool" with these two cut-ups. — Rick Levin

The Great American Trailer Park Musical runs through Feb. 18 at Actors Cabaret, 996 Willamette St.; actorscabaret.org