

LOVE, DENIAL AND JUDGMENT DAY

Lord Leebrick Theatre presents
Next Fall

Luke is going to come out to his parents next fall. Always next fall.

For Luke (John Jeffrey) conservative, literalist Christianity has made sense of the world, giving him peace and even joy. He views homosexuality as his own particular struggle and prays for forgiveness while taking great pleasure in this "sin." It works for him, but not for the man he has fallen in love with: Adam (Tony Stirpe) can claim the preachy moral high ground of an atheist but is wracked with doubt and angst, scrambling for a sense of purpose as he negotiates his way through the world.

Geoffrey Nauffts' award-winning play tackles the issue of church and sex with humor, heartbreak and complexity. Craig Willis directs with an even hand to all points of view, highlighting only the fact that every one of the characters is trapped by homophobia.

Storm Kennedy gives the performance of her career as Luke's mother Arlene. With simple clarity, this Southern belle-turned party girl-turned back to the church knows exactly where her own faults lie. Yet peeking through her hilarious, outrageous ramblings and ranting, is absolute love: love for her son, her ex-husband, and even for the partner that Luke cannot acknowledge. William Campbell also wows with a stellar performance as the foul-mouthed,



LEFT TO RIGHT: TOM WILSON, DONELLA-ELIZABETH ALSTON, TONY STIRPE, JOHN JEFFREY, STORM KENNEDY, WILLIAM CAMPBELL

litigation-threatening bigot who loves his son so much he can't listen to him.

Tom Wilson is grave as Brandon, another conservative Christian, who has come to peace with his attraction to men, but draws the line at falling in love. Donella-Elizabeth Alston plays well as Holly, a point of sanity in this storm.

Lacking in this play is chemistry between the central couple. Adam's love for Luke is not palpable, but his frustration sure is. The poignancy of their tragedy is lost without a belief that they could really make it together. Not that Nauffts gives the lovers much to work with, the slices of their lives you get to see inevitably roll back into an argument about religion.

Next Fall doesn't provide any clean answers. For those who walk easy in the world knowing they will never be

beaten bloody for who they choose to love, never asked to live a lie to maintain their family's love, there is much in this play to remind us of the injustice that continues to rage for so many. Yet right next to the painful examples of bigotry and willful misunderstanding, the healing power of a conformist faith is given its fair due. Some of the arguments about Christianity run a bit stale, pointing out the logistical fallacies of the rapture, rather than the amorality of denying homosexuals the right to love, but Nauffts does do a beautiful job of illustrating the weaknesses inherent in faith and atheism.

Ultimately, this touching story quietly proclaims that here on earth, we are one another's salvation, come what may in the hereafter. ■

Next Fall plays at Lord Leebrick Theatre Nov. 2 – 25; \$16-\$24; \$12, 25 and under.

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Directed by David Trussell

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