

Faithful Cheaters Will Make Your Sides Ache



I love seeing new theater, mainly because I never know what to expect! Sure something can be billed as a comedy, but maybe it's not that funny. Something can be billed as poignant, but maybe it's really kind of flat. It's exciting as an audience member to sit there as the lights come up on a play that few have seen. Walking into something without any prior knowledge is a rarity in today's world of social media at our fingertips. The world premiere of Deborah Salem Smith's comedy *Faithful Cheaters* is hysterically funny. Part of that is because Salem Smith has written a piece that is akin to the older sex farces audiences have come to know, and part of that is because of the skills the performers have in bringing this play to life. I'm not exaggerating, my sides hurt so much during this play I felt that my core had been given a workout!

The Dowling Theater has been transformed into Sonoma. And don't let that name deceive you; it sounds like a beautiful upscale vineyard, but in reality it is a small cluster of dilapidated cabins without running water and with raccoons as guests. Cristina Todesco did a beautiful job with the set, and Daniel J. Kotlowitz's lighting design was the perfect companion. I audibly gasped at the sunset.

Now, as for the actors. I'm running out of ways to say how talented the casts are at Trinity Rep. How lucky are we to have actors in our own backyard that can have us laughing so hard our cheeks and our sides hurt and two minutes later can totally devastate you with the turn? What can one say about Anne Scurria that hasn't been said already? I've been a fan of Anne Scurria my entire Trinity going life, which began over 20 years ago. She never disappoints — a formidable Julius Caesar one of my favorite Scrooge's to this day and this role of the flighty and endearing pot brownie baking mother Marion Stevens were just perfect. I can't remember the last time I saw her in a comedy, but this is the one you can't miss her in. It is almost impossible to take your eyes away from her while she is on stage. And you can't help but wish her character could adopt you.

Rebecca Gibel plays Poppy Stevens, who we learn has had a one night stand, much to the dismay of her mothers. Gibel has been with the company since 2013 and continues to show audiences just why she's here. She is always an absolute joy to watch onstage, and we can only hope her career with our state's repertory company is just as long as Anne Scurria's. Stephen Thorne plays her nerdy, allergy-ridden, scientist husband Theo, who also happens to be harboring a secret about their finances. Thorne, of course, is never a disappointment onstage. He is as wildly funny as he is heartbreaking on stage.

Enter Phil, the man who lives in one of the cabins, played sublimely by Mauro Hantman. Phil pops up everywhere, wearing no more than a towel. His enthusiasm for everything is contagious, as is evident from the peals of laughter when he steps on stage. To emulate a line of Phil's, Mauro is awesome!

Karen MacDonald, who is visiting Trinity, is a Boston-based actress who will hopefully make the trek down to Providence again! She plays Nance Stevens, Marion's wife, and is superb as the work-addicted mom who is not as free as her counterpart. She worries about money, and is much more practical. MacDonald is very convincing in the role. Rounding out this zany cast is Charlie Thurston who plays Poppy's high school sweetheart "Butsy" Benini Jr. Butsy. Thurston is funny as the clueless ex beau, and also doubled as the fight choreographer.

Deborah Salem Smith has written a wonderful play. It is a new play, so yes you may walk out of the theater with an unanswered question or two. (One being intentional, one not quite as intentional regarding Phil's character.) Frequently we're told women are just not funny. If you know someone who feels this way I implore you to buy them a ticket to show them how wrong they are. Salem Smith has constructed a hysterical night of comedy and one that makes you think on the way out of the theater.

Faithful Cheaters runs through May 21. For tickets call 401-351-4242, or visit trinityrep.com