

The Community Players' 'Sugar Sisters' are Sweet

What would happen if you put *Steel Magnolias*, *Twin Peaks*, *The X-Files* and a Stephen King novel in a blender, blended them together, and dumped the result into the Florida swamp?



You might get something like the extremely entertaining and delightfully bizarre *The Sugar Bean Sisters*, presented in Pawtucket by The Community Players.

Nathan Sanders wrote the play that beams audiences into the Florida home, in a swamp near Disney World, inhabited by the Nettles sisters, Faye and Willie Mae. Faye anxiously awaits the return of an alien spaceship which promises, she believes, to take her away from it all, while Willie Mae is equally hopeful that a good Mormon man will sweep her away just as fast. One stormy night in August, a stranger appears on their doorstep and things quickly go from strange to stranger in what becomes a very dark, very funny comedy.

Longtime Community Players veteran Karen Kessler plays Faye with a wonderful balance between an innocent child and a scheming, wily adult. While there may be moments when Faye seems dumbfounded or clueless, it's clear there's a lot more going on underneath than meets the eye. Kessler has the chance, as Faye, to say what may be some of the most silly and unusual lines ever written, and she does so with a perfectly straight face. She handles well the broad comedy and the sensitive moments.

Equally capable of handling everything the role asks of her is Janette Gregorian as Willie Mae. Her every emotion is honest and palpable. For example, when she speaks about wanting to get married, it is a very real and touching moment. A charismatic stage presence, Gregorian also gets to have some clear fun while playing this character who is the crazy aunt we've all either had or heard about.

Barbara Schapiro plays the unexpected visitor, Videlia Sparks, who sets in motion some hilarious and unexpected events. Schapiro's Videlia fits right in with the other two eccentric characters and the actress more than holds her own. The three of them together on stage are a force to be reckoned with. The cast is rounded out by two actors who make the most of smaller roles, Paul Collins as Bishop Crumley, and Alyce Fitzgerald-Hagopian as The Reptile Woman. Her appearance onstage may be brief

but it is highly memorable.

The cast is helped by the well-balanced touch of director Vincent Lupino. Only a few times did I get the sense that a director was at work, controlling the actors' actions, responses or movements. The rest of the play felt very natural and organic, indicating that Lupino let things happen as they should instead of imposing his will on the action. I also got the impression that the rehearsal period must have been fun for director and actors alike. The process of playing with and exploring these characters, scenes and moments must have been fun and exciting.

In the end, the production left an indelible mark on the memory and a smile on the faces of the audience. When the show was over, they may have felt sad to be leaving these characters, wishing they could have spent more time in their weird and wonderful world.

The Sugar Bean Sisters, The Community Players , Jenks Auditorium, Division St, Pawtucket.
www.thecommunityplayers.org Runs Jan 20-22