

Youngblood Reviews for...

DAVID'S REDHAIRD DEATH

Milwaukee Theater Examiner

July 11, 2009

Youngblood makes first strike with 'Death'.

I'm glad it's not just me. I'm glad I'm not the only one it can happen to. Somehow, knowing that there are other people out there whose actions in a particular situation can be effected by other unrelated events in their life, allows me to forgive myself. In the case of Jean, one of a pair of David's redheads, it's a tragic family event that creates a roadblock to the beatific romance of her dreams.

The best theatre, or any art medium for that matter, speaks of truths universal. The irony of this phenomenon is that the more personal and specific an artistic expression is the wider identifying audience it will have. Thus, when poets write of love they write of things like "summer's day" and "a thing with feathers", and when a playwright like Sherry Kramer writes of love she writes of redheads Jean and Marilyn. Although the plot of the play, told in memories, involves their preempted love affair, it covers a truth we can all understand. That is, sometimes life interferes in ways we can't expect and looking back on it we can't believe we acted the way we did, i.e. life is what happens when you're busy making other plans, i.e. sometimes life royally sucks.

What doesn't suck is Youngblood Theatre Company's production of David's Redhaired Death. After a somewhat rocky start, Death takes hold of you and carries you along for the duration.

The redheads, Tess Cinpinski and Jazmin Vollmar, have enough chemistry to rivet your attention. Their exchanges about the redhead experience are fast and engaging.

Vollmar, as Marilyn, the injured collateral, makes each moment genuine and fun. Even little actions such as biting her lip seem specifically chosen yet natural. Zachary Spencer and Joshua Sandvick are perfectly supportive as the silent males who provide unconditional servitude to the crimson-haired women.

The black box set is sparse, effectively relying on the talent of the actors to provide enough entertaining aesthetic. Alex Schuerell's lighting design is smooth and stealthy, organically supporting the appropriate mood.

Laura K. Sedlak's stage direction seems a bit clunky at times as the characters switch from present to past to audience address, but she was able to draw out authentic performances and maintain a good pace without lags. With more experience her skills will cohesively shine.

~ Matthew Konkel

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Shepherd Express –Curtains

July 11, 2009

Redheads: Youngblood Theatre's Opening

Youngblood Theatre opened its first show to a sizeable group of people last night. 7:30 pm: The theatre space in UWM's Studio Theatre has a minimalist feel to it. Everybody settles in. (It's opening night and there are some really talented people in the audience . . . people I'd seen onstage before. People I'd interviewed in the past . . .) and then Youngblood's Michael Cotey introduces the show . . . and tastefully introduces the company in a very concise, formal curtain speech. He stands behind a microphone as he does so. He finishes-up his speech. The lights dim.

When the lights come back-up, Tess Cinpinski is behind the mic. Dressed entirely in black: she's playing Jean—Jean who's the sister of David—David who is the title character who never actually shows-up in the play. The title of the play is David's Redhaired Death.

TESS CINPINSKI, JAZMIN VOLLMAR, SHERRY KRAMER AND THE SCRIPT

It's a play by Sherry Kramer—a contemporary playwright from the East Coast (as near as I can make out) who has had a number of plays open there over the course of the past twenty or so years. This one debuted in '91 in Washington DC. Primarily, it's a love story between two redheads. Jean (Tess Cinpinski) meets Marilyn (Jazmin Vollmar) and they have an instant connection. The usual story of two people falling in love is overshadowed by something darker that Jean doesn't want to explore . . . and Marilyn wants her to confront and let go of.

It's a script that beautifully and poetically loves to tell a good story. It does so many different times in many different ways from many different angles. And in delivering the text in character with what can only be a genuine love for both, Cinpinski makes it easy to want the story to go on forever into the evening . . . she's magnetically linked to the text . . . delivering it with beautifully raw emotion. Jazmin Vollmar composes herself really well in the role of Marilyn. We feel her frustration at Jean's inability to move on.

Both actresses deftly carry lines of dialogue that are quirky, idiosyncratic and often only thematically linked to the plot. They manage this without making the story seem at all disjointed. Both actresses deftly carry lines of dialogue that are quirky, idiosyncratic and often only thematically linked to the plot without making the story seem at all disjointed.

LOVE, DARKNESS AND THE ILLUSION OF IDENTITY

And it's the little things at the center of the love story that are really interesting. It's the stuff that doesn't always get a whole lot of attention in love stories that Sherry Kramer is exploring here. As Jean and Marilyn begin to make that romantic connection . . . they begin to find those similarities that tie them together. And it's not often discussed in explorations of romance, but when you're falling in love even the most mundane similarities end up feeling like some Divine Fate. It's subtle, but for instance, when Jean expresses amazement at the fact that not only do they both smoke, but they both smoke the same brand of cigarettes . . . it's only tangentially mentioned at first that the brand happens to be Camel Filters—one of the single most common brands of cigarettes in

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America. (Okay, so it would've been kind of an amazing coincidence if they'd both smoke Djarum Blacks or Dunhills or something, but Camel Filters?)

It's that kind of beautifully subtle humor that makes another dark love story seem so fresh and inviting. And at the center of it all there's this exploration of those things we cling to that represent our individuality—personified here in the relatively common unique quality of being a redhead (and there really is A LOT of discussion of what it's like to be a woman with red hair--the mystique, the identity. The number of redheaded women in Milwaukee could probably sell out every seat in the theatre space for every performance. It's difficult to imagine a play like this NOT intrinsically appealing to at least some of them . . .) The mystique of being redheaded women is something both characters are clinging to . . . that and so many other little artifacts of personality that identify us as individuals—that identify our romantic love as being unique.

But what Sherry Kramer's really talking about here in a sense is the myth of fingerprints that Paul Simon (the musician, not the Senator) was so passionate about in 1986. And to make up for that reference, I'll hope to gain hipster points by mentioning that the script reminded me of a cross between Jeanette Winterson and Cintra Wilson, but it's really no use. It's like Jean's obsession with the goal of ordering the same items from a McDonald's in every single state. (An apallingly common place with a redheaded mascot.) It's that search for the new perspective on something incredibly mundane that drives us to search for individuality. Yes we're all individuals, but we're all linked. Those things that form an identity are incredibly common and the myth of the rugged individualist—the mega-celebrity is just as fragile as the power that holds us all together. And the death of one person effects so many others and identity is . . . well . . . I'm reaching here for something that's hard to pin down, but the point is that the script is very, very compelling and provocative stuff and one of the best scripts I've seen staged this year.

LAURA SEDLAK AND EMOTION WITHOUT ORNAMENTATION

Director Laura K. Sedlak brings the script to the stage with a classy kind of minimalism. This play is so centrally about people that it would seem at odds with the central theme of the play to throw all kinds of ornamentation—set decoration, elaborate costuming and such onto the raw emotion onstage even if they HAD the budget for it. Like so many of my favorite scripts, it really wouldn't work in a bigger production. And the music cues fade-in tastefully, hauntingly and subtly, fading out the same way. Everything seems almost perfectly framed here. There might've been a few moments where certain lines in the script weren't delivered with the right emphasis in the right places, but that could've been simply the way I was hearing it . . . really the most amazing thing here is that the whole thing goes really, really smoothly and doesn't ever feel at all dull, boring or unduly tiresome from beginning to end without intermission.

~ *Russ Bickerstaff*