

Theatre Reviews

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SUMMER SKETCH

THE COLOR PURPLE

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SUMMER SKETCH

By Michelle Brzycki, Caleb H. Moore, Chaz Pofahl, Stacey Rose, James Shafer, Matt Webster, Shon Wilson, and Greta Marie Zandstra

Actor's Theatre of Charlotte
August 28-29, 2009

A new theatre group has sprouted in Charlotte, dedicated to actors performing their own material. Eight talented actors took turns in writing and directing, as well as the playing roles in 14 skits, in the Saturday Night Live style. Shon Wilson took on the lead job of producing the show, along with being a company member.

With minimal yet evocative scenery on the wide, Actor's Theatre stage, the skits (like similar parodies on TV) were often satirical, frequently hilarious, and sometimes fell flat. Costuming and props increased the pleasure, especially in "Blind Date" (by Zandstra), when a medieval knight (Shafer) meets a modern black woman (Wilson) and comical confusion results. Their waiter, Mr. Andre (Pofahl), also adds comical flavors, with his French accent and gestures, in "Salad with a Side of Green" (by Webster), when a mother and daughter (Brzycki and Zandstra) find their politics twisting around the menu's choices. Another success in the show is "Hit Me" (by Shafer) with Spam Shade (Webster), an assassin for hire disguised as a private eye, whose client (Rose) surprises him with her deadly desires. Even more media parody and political bite comes from "Absolute Justice," a Judge Judy satire (by Pofahl), and "Rainbow Road," a TV game show about stereotypes (by Webster).

The second act got less laughs and wore out some in the audience, unfortunately inspiring a drunken spectator to verbalize his thoughts loudly on opening night. Yet both Jesus and the Easter Bunny (Shafer and Moore) made intriguing appearances in a comical, mythic skit penned by Rose. The parody of TV wrestling shows, "WWTF" (by Brzycki), revealed some backstage surprises. And "Sista Secretary" (by Rose) provided the most insightful satire, with a tour-de-force performance by Wilson as a legal secretary, code switching between her black friends on the phone and her formal office duties, while the situation around her becomes evermore schizoid—with the lawyer (Pofahl), his mistress (Zandstra), his wife (Webster), a delivery man (Shafer), and a woman (Brzycki) with itches she can't stop scratching.

Overall, the show deserved some editing, especially in the scripts not mentioned here, which went on too long with a simple, repeated idea. But this group shows much promise for its next production in the spring, Shakespeare Sketch, with talented writer-performers who create plenty of silly and yet intriguing caricatures. **Review by Mark Pizzato**

Mark Pizzato is Professor of Theatre at UNC-Charlotte and author of *Ghosts of Theatre and Cinema in the Brain* and *Theatres of Human Sacrifice*. His plays have been published by Aran Press and his screenplays, produced as short films, have won New York Film Festival and Minnesota Community Television awards.

(Full Disclosure: Matt Webster is a fellow professor of Mark Pizzato's at UNCC's Department of Theatre; Stacey Rose and James Shafer are his former students there.)