

The Snake Can: Theater Review

by Myron Meisel



The Bottom Line

Smart comedy of trio of fiftyish privileged women navigating the hazards of single life.

Venue

Odyssey Theater (runs through Mar. 2)

Cast

Jane Kaczmarek, Gregory Harrison, Diane Cary, Sharon Sharth, James Lancaster, Joel Polis

Director

Steven Robman

Playwright

Kathryn Graf

Jane Kaczmarek co-stars in this perceptive look at three women's lives set in the New York suburbs.

Harriet (**Jane Kaczmarek**) is seven years widowed with no life outside of her children. Nina (**Diane Cary**) has summarily left her marriage to star actor Paul (**Gregory Harrison**) to pursue independently her own muse as an artist.

Meg (**Sharon Sharth**), after two failed marriages, has managed an apparently ample dating life without meaningful satisfaction.

Harriet reluctantly dips her toe into an email flirtation, Nina resists Paul's overtures to reunite and throws herself into applying paint to canvas with her body parts, while Meg pines for the elusive connubial perquisites of soulmate and children, envying each of her friends as they in turn are awed by her.

A distant descendent of those three single-women-on-the-town movies of the early 1930s like *The Greeks Had a Word for Them* or *Gold Diggers of 1933*, *The Snake Can* manages to be pert, irreverent, sympathetic and perhaps somewhat too bright to be entirely true.

The tone tends toward an update on **Paul Mazursky** from a distaff view.

Playwright **Kathryn Graf** had a sizeable success with *Hermetically Sealed* last year at the Skylight Theatre, and this new work creates engrossing characters of definite type with suggestions of dimension that the excellent players shade into immediacy.

It may not bear scrutiny as a portrait of actual people's lives, but it does dramatize in breezy yet heartfelt fashion genuine concerns of middle-age mating, and displays a broad enough vision to encompass as nuanced an attitude toward the men as the women, although it is refreshing to share, for a change, the lens of the female gaze in perceiving personality.

Kaczmarek exhibits an ability to convey a sense of a close-up on the broad stage, conveying mixed feelings with precision. Sharth has to struggle against a somewhat overfamiliar archetype and valiantly makes credible all that the women see in her and the men do not.

Perhaps most striking and original is Cary, whose contradictory emotions are most outsized and least shared. She renders inchoate longings tangible and far more clear to the audience than to herself.

James Lancaster makes a particularly ambiguous and distinctive character as Harriet's email correspondent as an unconflicted bisexual with patience and candor to spare.

Harrison has the rare gift onstage of self-effacement and selecting his accents sparingly – it makes him a sympathetic model even if with all his celebrity he still cannot get what he wants.

Director **Steven Robman** navigates the occasionally bumpy shifts in mood with steady fluidity.

The Snake Can (a reference to the old gag gift, a Jack-in-the-Box for adults), though set in the New York suburbs, fits snugly into the Westside demographic, and it knows well how to amusingly provide an intelligent reflection of its intended audience. It should prove to be deservedly popular.

Venue: Odyssey Theater (runs through March 2)

Cast: Jane Kaczmarek, Gregory Harrison, Diane Cary, Sharon Sharth, James Lancaster, Joel Polis

Director: Steven Robman

Playwright: Kathryn Graf

Set Designer: Jeffery P. Eisenmann

Lighting Designer: Adam Blumenthal

Costume Designer: Miguel Montalvo

Sound Designer: Cricket S. Myers

Projection Designer: Hana S. Kim

Producer: Racquel Lehrman of Theatre Planners for Indie Chi Productions