

'The Snake Can' at the Odyssey Theater gets her thinking

By Iris Schneider

It's been hard to ignore the baggage that comes with aging. As the medicare cards and applications crowd my mailbox, and funerals of friends--not their parents--pop up in my emails, the signs are all around me. I guess I have to accept that I really am that old. Of course, as my mom told me, age is only a number and from someone who'll turn 99 on her birthday in April, she should know. Of course, she's also said "Getting old is not for sissies," and as I struggle with the ups and downs of memory lapses and other annoying changes, I concur. Fortunately I still have a kid in high school--if you want to do the math, I was just shy of 48 when she was born--so I'm hanging on for dear life to my membership in the child-rearing set. I guess in my neighborhood the thing that dates me the most is not my graying hair but the fact that I don't have a single tattoo to show the world how cool I am.

So it was with some trepidation that I sat down to watch "The Snake Can," Kathryn Graf's play about "middle age" at the Odyssey Theater through February 24. "Proceed with caution," the tagline warns, and duly warned, I was worried about seeing another treatise on the travails of navigating the aging process. But the piece was really more about the friendships, loyalties, yearnings and fears that accompany us on our life's journey, and it moved me to tears. Of course, as my children can attest, I cry during commercials, movie trailers and "Story Corps" on NPR. In fact, unless I can find something to cry about in a movie, I deem it a non-starter. So I am an easy target.

But I found the characters in "Snake Can" real and honest, and once the second act unfolded, I genuinely cared about their lives and their struggles.

The play, directed by Steven Robman, centers on three women (Graf has written in the notes that they actually each represent a part of herself): Nina (Diane Cary), an artist who has been living in the shadow of her famous actor husband; Meg (Sharon Sharth), a successful and outwardly upbeat career woman still looking for love after two failed and childless marriages and Harriet (Jane Kaczmarek), a widow with two children who's finally decided after seven years alone that it's time to get out there and date again. These days that means signing up on a dating website that eliminates the drudgery and uncertainty of actually going out, and soon we meet a sampling of what's available for women of a certain age. Of course, we don't need to be reminded of the narrow playing field, but Graf and her women navigate with humor and a good bit of wisdom.

Each of the women has their personal crisis, fostered by the men in, or in and out of, their lives, but what resonated for me was the love and loyalty that defined the long friendships these women have forged over years and years, and the strength and solace those friendships provide.

Their stories are familiar and we can relate, and they are seasoned with a good bit of candor. Afterwards I found myself thinking and talking with my husband about my own journey, and our struggles, triumphs and disappointments. If a good play engenders a good discussion, "Snake Can" more than passes the test. And anything that can make you laugh at getting older is a worthwhile way to spend some time.