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STAGEScenELA  
**WOW!**

When was the last time you saw a play about three women on the cusp of fifty navigating the rough waters of big city singlehood? Actually, when was the last time you saw anything—play, movie, or TV series—about three fiftyish females period?

Since the answer to both of these questions is likely to be a big fat “Never,” Kathryn Graf’s world premiere dramedy *The Snake Can* comes as a particularly welcome surprise ... and a rewarding New Years 2013 treat.



*The Snake Can* introduces us to Harriet (Jane Kaczmarek), Nina (Diane Cary), and Meg (Sharon Sharth), three modern-day New Yorkers whose longtime friendship anchors their otherwise rocky lives.

Now in her seventh year of widowhood following a devoted twenty-year marriage, Harriet has reentered the dating pool courtesy of Matchmaker.luv, her eyes set on a man named Stephen whom she has yet to meet in person.

Twice-divorced Meg has a refrigerator covered with snapshots of men she’s gone out with in hopes of finding Mr. Right, though if she keeps on meeting men like Jake, for whom steady dating is clearly anathema, she’s likely to mateless for a long time to come.

Twice-divorced Meg has a refrigerator covered with



Then there’s Nina, a woman separated from movie star husband Paul but unwilling to consider divorce, whose search for artistic fulfillment involves painting huge abstract canvases using her nipped/tucked body parts in lieu of brushes, even as her not-exactly-ex still pines for a reconciliation.

Over the course of its two, swift-moving acts, *The Snake Can* (the not particularly catchy title refers to those “Snake In A Can” pranks) grants us permission to be flies on the walls of these three fascinating contemporary women of a certain age, and does so

in often quite compelling ways.

Under Steven Robman’s astute direction, a cast of six L.A. stage-and-screen vets deliver all-around fine performances topped by one in particular that should come as no surprise to L.A. theater regulars.



Let’s start with the men.

Gregory Harrison is Paul, a role which must ring close to home for the still youthfully dashing actor who became a household name in his late twenties on *Trapper John, M.D.*; Harrison’s own star status adds an extra layer of verisimilitude to scenes which have him being recognized by one fan or acquaintance after another to amusing effect. Still, it is in dramatic scenes, those which show us a man despairing the demise of a marriage he didn’t want to see end, that Harrison proves himself not only a

bankable star but a crackerjack stage actor as well.

James Lancaster is a nonstop delight as Stephen, seen first (and hilariously) in fantasy videos conjured up by a besotted Harriet. Later, when the “You’ve Got Mail” would-be daters finally meet and Stephen drops the bomb that “I like penis but I don’t want to have a relationship with it,” Lancaster’s portrayal of a gay man’s exploration of his straight side becomes rich and multilayered.

The always terrific Joel Polis gets not one role but two, the commitment-phobic Jake and (more colorfully) Stephen’s longtime gay chum Brad, who can’t quite figure out how Stephen could possibly want to put that there, and he is splendid in both.

As for the women, a dynamic Cary digs deep to reveal a seriously conflicted and at times borderline psycho Nina, though for this reviewer at least, it was hard to imagine Cary’s Nina and Harrison’s Paul as a twenty-year couple, much less nut-case Nina as a woman Paul would do anything to have back as his wife.

Sharth is a natural as Meg, blending spunk and vulnerability in a thoroughly real portrayal of a woman whose active dating life may seem from the outside to be just what the Love Doctor ordered, but who in reality is every bit as romantically and sexually frustrated as the next 50something single gal.



Best of the entire bunch is the sensational Kaczmarek, whose role on Malcolm In The Middle won her nominations and awards galore, once again proving herself a consummate theater actress—and a bona fide star. Kaczmarek’s Harriet is complex bundle of contradictions, ballsy but vulnerable, optimistic yet self-doubting, and never anything less than 100% authentic.

The Snake Can is playwright Graf’s follow-up to last year’s much lauded Hermetically Sealed, and a mostly marvelous script it is, one in which laughter comes from the simple fact of being around smart, witty people with an ability to see life in all its ironies. Dramatic moments are equally real, and Graf’s ear for dialog is a fine one. The play could use a stronger Act One climax, however, as its current intermission break seems arbitrary. There’s also a Stephen/Brad scene that is out of place in a play whose male characters have hitherto only revealed themselves as they do to Harriet, Nina, and Meg. To put it bluntly, we have no business knowing what the men say behind these women’s backs.

Unequivocal praise, on the other hand, goes out to The Snake Can’s design team, beginning with scenic designer Jeffery P. Eisenman and projection designer Hana S. Kim, whose combined efforts take us from one New York City spot to another, and vividly so. (A scene in which real and projected canvases seem interchangeable is a particular design winner.) Adam Blumenthal’s accomplished lighting design, Miguel Montalvo’s character-fitting costumes, Lorely Trinidad’s multiple props, and Cricket S. Myers’ as-always vivid sound design are winners as well, with a special tip of the hat to those Stephen videos.

Helen Geier is casting director. Racquel Lehrman is producer for Theatre Planners and Victoria Watson associate producer. Liana Dillaway is production stage manager and Priscilla Miranda assistant stage manager.

With its cast of smart, sophisticated, successful New Yorkers, The Snake Can seems a particularly appropriate fit for West L.A.’s Odyssey Theatre. Our coasts may be three thousand miles apart, but Angelinos on the West Side and New Yorkers on the Upper West Side would seem to be a match made, not on Matchmaker.luv, but in theatrical heaven.

Odyssey Theatre, 2055 South Sepulveda Boulevard, Los Angeles. Through July 31. Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 8:00. Sundays at 2:00. Reservations: 310 477-2055 ext 2

[www.OdysseyTheatre.com](http://www.OdysseyTheatre.com)

–Steven Stanley  
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Photos: Ed Krieger