

Entertainment

Plays offer brutally honest looks at love

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Comedy and drama are melded beautifully in the Sidewalk Studio Theatre's production of "Beaten Hearts," seven sharply written and hilarious plays about love and those who find themselves consumed by it.

Co-written by the Australian born writer-director Christina Costigan, the play was brought to Los Angeles after an immensely successful run in Melbourne in 2009. People loved it there, and the show was a consistent sell-out. It's always a question of whether a foreign import will translate well with Americans, but I'm sure Costigan was never worried. "Beaten Hearts" speaks to the universal language of love, something we can all relate to.

The play has an unlikely quirkiness that is immediately evident. As the lights dim, the theme song of "Mission Impossible" plays over the loudspeakers, as a couple of spies in overcoats canvass the stage. Their significance is unknown but eventually they make room for a young couple in the throes of passion. No words are spoken as they undress at a frantic rate before making their way to the bedroom and presumably finish what they set out to do.

"Can you call me a cab?" the woman asks. It's obvious that the two have never met before this night, and probably won't see each other again. After a few moments of awkwardness, the two start talking about their past relationships.

"Delirium and reliability, that's what I want," the woman says. The man is looking for a similar type of "reliability" in his suitor and before long they are once again in the throes of passion. This time, however, it's real.

Costigan leads the ensemble cast and is likable, even when she's not supposed to be.

In "At the Threshold," written by her co-writer Bridgette Burton, Costigan plays an adulterous housewife who lures her husband's employee into bed. Costigan's housewife plays coy at first, when the employee (Max Kleinman) unexpectedly shows up at her front door, but ultimately convinces him that it's not just sex she's after, even though it's clear that sex is all she wants.

"Between you and me, it would have been the beginning," the lovesick employee tells her, to which she replies, "Beginnings are so beautiful." Her use of language is ambiguous enough to fulfill both her needs and his, and he follows her inside. The roles may be reversed but it comes as no shock to us, thanks to Costigan's confident performance.

In "A Favor for the Boss," one of the funnier plays in the bunch, Alexandra Aristy plays the ambitious wife of a mobster (James Skylar) who convinces her husband to sleep with his boss. In the wrong hands, a scene like this could have easily fallen victim to cliché, but Aristy's spot-on "New Yawk" honk makes lines like "No one kills a guy like you baby," sound all the more believable.

The Sidewalk Studio Theatre only seats about 30 people but its intimacy bodes well for a play like "Beaten Hearts." During the few plays that didn't require the performances of the entire cast, the other actors waited off to the side and watched. It was interesting to see if they would react like the rest of the audience, but for the most part they just stood back and kept a straight face.

Costigan and her co-writer Burton deserve many accolades for bringing this production to Los Angeles. It's scheduled to end today, but hopefully enough people see it to have its run extended. A play this good deserves multiple viewings.
