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Sensitive Guys Gives us Sensitive Guys

By Dennis Bloh

Interact Theatre Company is celebrating its 30th anniversary year, and few theaters can lay claim to such a rich and responsible legacy. I have been a fan of Interact almost from the beginning. Serving as a Barrymore judge and a reviewer I have seen many shows there. I would like to publicly thank them for their contribution to my awareness of the world and the people in it. *SENSITIVE GUYS* by MJ Kaufman fits neatly into that tradition of creating excellent and meaningful theater.

Director Evren Odcikin and his gifted actors and staff present the world premiere of this thoughtful and timely tale of how passionate but ingenuous college students often get in their own way dealing with important issues. Kaufman's play takes place in a small liberal arts college where sexual awareness is reduced to two extracurricular groups, one for men and one for women. Kaufman is rightfully harsh on the well-meaning pretentiousness of both groups whose self-congratulatory underpinning makes their goals even harder to reach.

Kaufman gives us perspective by couching the vignettes around an incident that suggests that one great danger of their over zealousness is the opportunity for hypocrisy. They structure the play by alternating meetings of the two clubs and their efforts to "deal with their shit." What makes it even more interesting is that the five men and the five women are all played by the same five actors. It is a strong conceit that challenges the audience to observe the behaviors of the characters rather than the actors themselves.

The five actors that Odcikin employs are uniformly excellent. Any distinction in their performances are more a function of the writing of the character than the skill of the individual actor. This great ensemble includes Emily Lynn, Bi Jean Ngo, Lexie Braverman, Maggie Johnson, and Brett Ashley Robinson. They not only capture the nuance of each representative character, but even more impressive is the way they interact with each other both as men and as women.

Kudos also to the technical staff. **Melpomene Katalalos's simple, but elegant set reads private college and allows cast and crew to move pieces around quickly so as not to lose the flow of the action.** Maria Shaplin's lighting plot joins Shannon Zura's sound design to establish the distinguished playing spaces needed for the actors. Katherine Fritz's costumes are simple but representative of the individual characters and simple so that the transitions are seamless.

SENSITIVE GUYS does not offer solutions. It does, however, show that even when we think we know the questions that there is really a whole lot more to deal with in such an intricate and complicated issue. Interact Theatre can put another notch in its belt for bringing strong theater together with substantive issues. The play runs until February 11th. I suggest that this play might be even more impressive if you see it with a group of friends of all sexes. The discussion afterwards might be fun as well as meaningful.