



CATHARTIC PLAY MOVES REVIEWER TO TEARS

BY BEVERLY FRIEND

If it is true that the best gifts often come in the smallest packages, it is often equally valid that the best theater can occur in the smallest venues. This is certainly the case with Botanic Garden – a gem of a play – currently being performed in the small, intimate space of the Piccolo Theatre, 600 Main St. Evanston.

Botanic Garden – written by Winnetka native Todd Logan, directed by Academy Award-winner Olympia Dukakis, and performed by the stellar talents of husband and wife actors Carmen Roman and James Leaming, successfully world premiered last winter at the Victory Gardens Greenhouse Theatre. Now suburbanites needn't face wintry trips into the city, while Chicagoans can easily make the brief trek north – at least until the final performance June 15.

As the story opens, recently widowed Kate, (played with enormous verve by Roman), is dreading an imminent blind date scheduled to be a walk in a botanical garden. Her emotional struggle is dramatized in pointed conversations with her late husband Jake (engagingly depicted by Leaming). Talks in the present time frame are interlaced with pertinent, interchanges from the past, where they quibble and make up, revealing their complex relationship as we work toward an ending so poignant and cathartic that this reviewer was moved to tears.

While it is tempting to glibly write that you don't have to be a widow to respond to this play, certainly as a widow I felt an enormous cord of sympathy as well as respect for the skills of the author and cast. In the post-show discussion, when playwright Logan was asked what had inspired him, he cited his own personal losses. Certainly, anyone who has been or is in a loving relationship will resonate with the emotions depicted here.

Yesterday Chicago; today Evanston, and I predict a long theatrical life for this very universal, highly portable and moving play.

Highly Recommended