



What's it like acting with `Loose Women'?

ABQ Tribute

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Friday, September 15, 2006

<http://www.abqtrib.com/news/2006/sep/15/whats-it-acting-loose-women/>

"Loose Women of Low Character" continues through this weekend at Sol Arts, 712 Central Ave. S.E.

After seeing a production of "Loose Women of Low Character" at Sol Arts recently, I felt compelled to talk to Joseph West.

"Loose Women" is a collection of more than 20 sketches written by 13 women, directed by two women and performed by a cast of nine women and one man. Joseph West is the one man.

I called him at his day job at an Oriental rug store to see what being the lone man among "loose women" is like.

"Exciting," he said. "I knew about half the women who wrote the pieces, and I was interested to see what they had done."

"That's good," I said. "Uh, did you have your own dressing room?"

"No, we all used the same one," he said. "Sometimes I'd duck into the bathroom because it could get pretty crowded in (the dressing room). But they were really comfortable around me, and I was pretty comfortable with them.

"When the stage manager cued us backstage, she'd just say, 'Ladies,' so I guess I just became one of the girls. It was fine."

As you might expect of a show drawn from so many different sources, "Loose Women" is uneven. But at its best, it is funny, sad, heartbreaking and thought-provoking. And even though it's relatively long, it's not tedious.

It is often edgy, and I bet it has a different impact on women than on men. After all, it's a show in which strong-minded women sound off about aspects of their lives - including men.

"I think the show may be a little harder for men to take, because they are going to be automatically on guard," West, 27, said. "A lot of the monologues are about how women feel about men. And in some cases, I've been that guy they're talking about - because I was young and didn't know how to act around women."

West is in five sketches.

He's not much more than part of the set in "Oversexed"; he's a geek trying to be macho in "Girl Walks Into a Bar"; he's a jerk trying to coax girls into a motel bathtub with him in "The Canadian"; he loses his pants and gets tied up on a motel bed in "Pizza Man"; and - well, we'll get to "Mirror Ball."

West says his favorite roles were the geek in "Girl Walks" and the jerk in "The Canadian."

"Because I kind of view myself as a comic actor," he said "Those pieces gave me the chance to do some of the schtick I love, some of the stuff - like Dick Van Dyke, Jerry Lewis and Jim Carrey - that I watched growing up."

"Mirror Ball" was West's most demanding sketch. It must have been for everyone involved, including those of us watching. It may be the longest piece in the show, but it's the one that has the audience holding its breath - to catch every word, to grasp what has happened, to find out what will happen.

It's about a woman (Rachel Tatum) who has had unprotected sex with a man even though she suspected at the time that he might have a venereal disease.

Now, scared and lonely, she confronts her alter egos (Ann Beyke) and (West) in two mirrors.

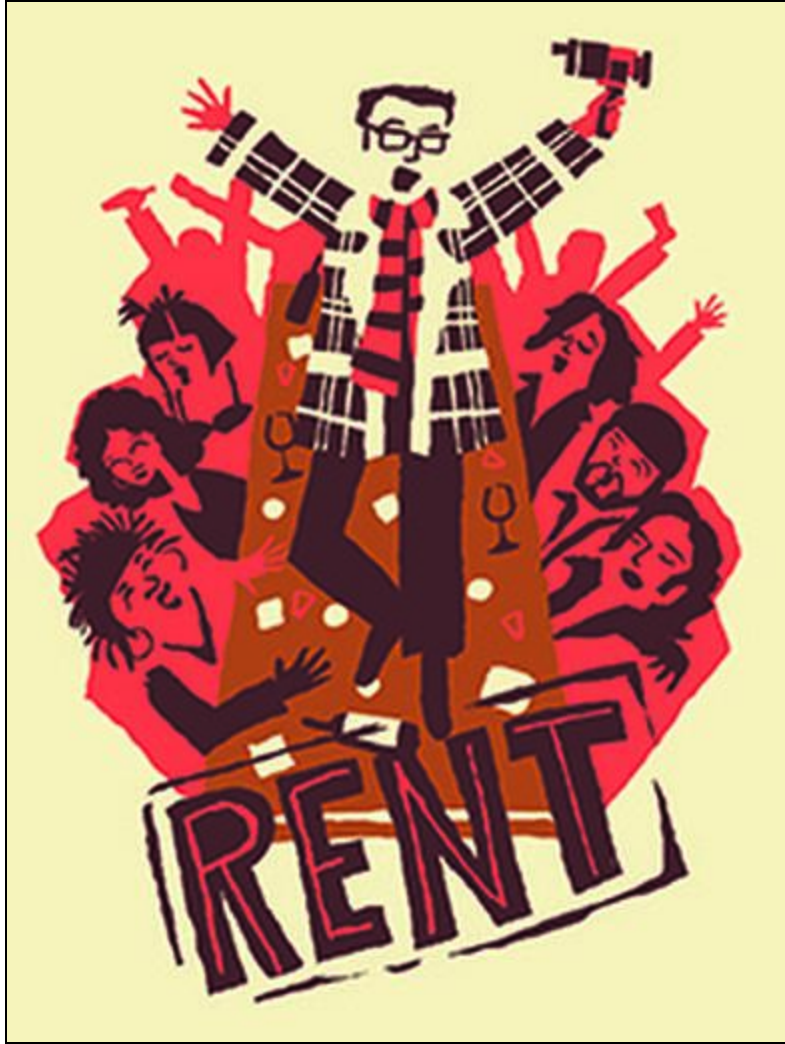
Beyke is the good-girl ego, nagging but encouraging, too. West is the bad girl ego, the hard, ugly truth that's difficult to face.

All three of the actors in the sketch wear black women's nightgowns.

"My character is definitely kind of queeny and draggy," West said. "But it's also the most dynamic character I play. It was challenging physically, emotionally and mentally. There's a level of discomfort in 'Mirror Ball.' But the challenge was worth it because it pushed all of us."

West said his work in "Loose Women" has helped him grow - not only as an actor but maybe also as a man. He learned things backstage as well as on stage.

"I've definitely seen how women of all ages and races are with each other," he said. "I definitely think it will have an effect on me. Maybe it will change the way I am in my relationship with my girlfriend - or the way I relate to my sister or to my mom."



RENT

Copyright Albuquerque Journal

Jan 2, 1997

<http://business.highbeam.com/2872/article-1G1-107628716/passion-permeates-easons-love>

There's a late Christmas present for theater lovers playing at the Hiland Theatre tonight, a concert performance of "Rent."

Called "Seasons of Love: a concert celebrating highlights from Jonathan Larson's 'Rent,' " it's a gift from a talented group of performers and from Larson's parents, who live here in Albuquerque.

What a show! "Rent" has been the hottest ticket in New York since it opened in January. Based on Puccini's opera "La Boheme," it's the story of a bunch of young artists living on the edge in Manhattan. It's fresh, fast, full of passion and energy.

It's about youth in the face of death, about living for the day, and it's heartbreaking because its young creator died last January before the show opened.

This production is a benefit; the ticket price is pay-as-you-wish, a donation to the Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation, which is designed to give grants to the struggling artists represented in the show, much like Larson, who supported himself as a waiter while he wrote and composed. And much like the cast and crew of this production -- many are current or former students of UNM's theater program, and from the passion of their performances, you can tell this show belongs to them, not like some ponderous mega-musical with a helicopter dropping to the stage, or a revival of something first staged 20 or 50 or 70 years ago.

It's the story of Mark (Adam Kidd, who also co-directs with Adriana Rowe) and Roger (Jon Krenrich), who live in a skanky loft and haven't paid rent in a year. Their old friend Benny (Byron Laurie) owns the building. But Benny has married into money, and he wants to convert the

building into a cyber-virtual-something and kick Roger and Mark out. Mark's ex-girlfriend Maureen (Rowe) stages a protest concert with the help of her new lover Joanne (Amani Malaika). In the meantime, their friend Collins (Matt Vasquez) falls in love with Angel (Bryan Cummins), and Roger falls in love with Mimi (Virginia Olivas). People die, people sell out, people break up, people change. People even think about soaking the rich by opening a restaurant in Santa Fe.

There are some great songs here; it's easy to see why "Rent" won the Tony this year for best musical. And even when it's not great, it's so fresh and passionate that it feels great. And it's a great cast, especially Kidd, Rowe, Cummins and Vasquez. Olivas as Mimi looked wonderful, but she was hard to hear over the band. This was the one overall problem at Monday's performance; the band (music director Joel Gelpie on keyboards, Lawrence Dominguez on guitar, David Lopez on bass and Bill Mudd on drums) was good, but the sound was mixed so that it overwhelmed the singers, especially those with softer voices, like Olivas and Krenrich. But that's a problem that can be fixed. How is the Hiland Theatre, recently purchased by Albuquerque Civic Light Opera, as a venue for live performance? Wonderful, big and more intimate in feeling than Popejoy Hall or the Kiva.

If you love theater, you should not miss tonight's performance of "Seasons of Love." It's a good show with a good cast, staged to benefit a good cause. It's full of life, and that's what theater is supposed to be all about. "Seasons of Love" Highlights from Jonathan Larson's "Rent" WHEN: Tonight at 8 p.m. WHERE: The Hiland Theatre on Central SE at Monroe HOW MUCH: Admission is a donation to the Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation; give what you can