



FACING EAST

Plan-B Theatre Company at Atlantic Stage 2

With a Mormon in the running for president, the arrival of this small but affecting play fresh from Salt Lake City seems most timely. Written by Carol Lynn Pearson, it has a basic premise: A Mormon father and mother stand at the grave of their gay son, who has committed suicide outside the Mormon Temple. As they both wrestle with the “Why?” of this, their son’s lover comes to the grave bearing flowers. While the premise may be simple, the play’s examination of the question of Mormonism versus homosexuality is surprisingly sophisticated. Pearson’s play bristles with authenticity, and she succeeds in making all three characters pleasingly real; even the dead son, Andrew, comes alive. The production, too, has a basic elegance under Jerry Rapiere’s sure-handed direction, enhanced by Randy Rasmussen’s simple set and Cory Thorell’s imaginative lighting design.

It opens a door onto Mormon lives that will prove fascinating to some and frightening to others—and some will experience those conflicting emotions simultaneously. The father, Alex (Charles Lynn Frost), a Mormon radio fixture with a show called *One-Minute Dad* on which he dispenses advice, is awash in love and guilt. “We stand guilty!” he cries. The mother, Ruth (Jayne Luke), is the forthright defender of the Mormon faith. She’s so confident of her eternal reward that her first question to God upon arrival in heaven is going to be, “Why did You make the sex thing so important?” Together the parents review the life of their dead son—his growing up, his missionary time, his excommunication, his finding a lover. Enter the said lover, Marcus (Jay Perry), whose first comment is, “The Mormon Church—what a trip!”

The trio then supplies lightning flashes that reveal the Mormon focus on the loving family and the eternal, mixed with self-righteousness, indoctrination, intolerance, and submerged violence. Here some may wish for more conflict with sharper knives, but that is not the name of Pearson’s game. No resolution is reached, but the journey is certainly worthwhile.

Frost makes a convincing and sympathetic father, while Perry infuses Marcus with integrity and a glowing tenderness. In the difficult role of Ruth, Luke happily does not make her a monster, only a blind and very believable mother.

*Presented by Plan-B Theatre Company
at Atlantic Stage 2, 330 W. 16th St., NYC.
May 29–June 17. Tue.–Sat., 8 p.m.; Sat. and Sun., 3 p.m.
(212) 279-4200 or www.ticketcentral.com.*

Reviewed by Karl Levett

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