

Circa '21's "Oh Mama! No Papa!" Is Fun ... for the Over-70 Set

Written by Mike Schulz

Tuesday, 14 June 2005 18:00

I've watched numerous comedies at the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse over the past decade, and I've never seen one that I thought would be offensive to most 80-year-olds. But until *Oh Mama! No Papa!*

I'd never seen a comedy that would be offensive to everyone
but
80-year-olds.

I found the *Oh Mama! No Papa!* script to be god-awful – a miserable mixture of geriatric jokes, sex jokes, and homilies about Living Life to the Fullest – but try telling that to the 300 seniors in the audience who roared throughout. For its intended audience, the show is a complete hoot, in part, perhaps, because a void has finally been filled: Southern belles have their

Steel Magnolias

, adulterous lovers have their

Same Time, Next Year

, and now, octogenarians have

Oh Mama! No Papa!

I didn't care for the show, but I wasn't really surprised by that – it isn't

meant

for me. And unless you, too, are in your 80s, it probably isn't meant for you, either.

In this farce, retirees Eleanor (Sherry Konjura) and Silas (Don Hepner), accompanied by Eleanor's daughter (Cheryl Hoffman) and Silas's son (Kevin Grastorf), meet in the waiting room of a doctor's office. Eleanor is a moaning, kvetching harridan; Silas is a mostly deaf grump. Love, naturally, blossoms, or at least it would if it weren't for the interference of their kids and the show's narrator (M.J.J. Cashman), who reminds us all to live life to the fullest while he's grinding the play to a halt.

Aside from the fact that its situations aren't believable and its jokes aren't funny, *Oh Mama! No Papa!* seems

mean-spirited besides; it's a show that insults the very audience members it's supposed to be entertaining. (Playwright Reginald Denham wants us to appreciate the difficulties of aging while having us laugh at his characters' physical ailments.) But again: Who am

I

to complain? On the night I saw the production, the almost unanimously elder audience loved it, and here's a brief list of what they found hilarious: References to HMOs, health insurance, and pelvic exams. Gags about fertility, sperm samples, and erections. Chiang Kai-shek. Diphtheria. Lutherans. (Lutherans, judging by Sunday night's crowd, are

really

funny.) Dr. Phil.

The National Enquirer

. And, of course, sex. Anything involving sex. The audience went crazy when characters uttered the

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word

“sex.” (I couldn’t believe the program didn’t contain a Viagra ad.) The show’s terrible lines were greeted with joy by Circa '21’s patrons, and, to be honest, it depressed the hell out of me; I’m all for people enjoying a second childhood, but a second stunted adolescence?

Although director David Lewis has a tendency to elongate bits of stage business past the breaking point – in Act I, a dialogue-free sequence of Silas readying for his date goes on for so long that the routine might as well be Act II – he guides the leads to comically expert performances. Hepner and Konjura are sharp, stylized performers who get laughs through absolute fearlessness; the *characters* might not deserve one another (or anyone else), but the actors, at least, are nicely matched. Also helping matters considerably are Rachelle Walljasper, doing a sharp Lily Tomlin-esque turn as a snippy receptionist, and the wonderful Cheryl Hoffman, who is such a warm, believable stage presence, and who gives her rare punchlines such throwaway charm, that you want to slap the playwright for turning her character into such a drip.

If you’re not Of A Certain Age, you might feel as uncomfortable at a performance of *Oh Mama! No Papa!*

as your great-grandfather might be at a Phish concert; if you are Of A Certain Age, you might, like many in the Circa '21 crowd, have the time of your life. Either way, if you’re going to catch *Oh Mama! No Papa!*

– and I rarely say this – try to be there on a night that’s nearly sold out. At least the reactions of the

audience

will keep you amused.

Tickets to Oh Mama! No Papa! are available by calling (309)-7733 or visiting <http://www.circa21.com>