

Cal Rep's 'The Goat' starts rough before hitting a nice groove



By A.K. Whitney

POSTED: 02/24/14, 5:24 PM PST | UPDATED: ON 02/24/2014

Even the happiest marriages will be derailed by accidents, illness, unemployment and death. It is hoped the parties involved get back on track, though there are no guarantees.

That said, there are some things you can never prepare for, such as when your spouse falls madly in love with a goat.

That's right, a goat.

If that happened to you, what would you do? Would you laugh? Cry? Rage?

This taboo love is at the center of Edward Albee's 2002 one-act "The Goat Or, Who is Sylvia?" where husband Martin confesses to longtime wife Stevie that he has fallen for Sylvia while house hunting in the countryside. And yes, Sylvia is of the capra, not the homo, genus.

The fallout, understandably, is tremendous, and not just from Stevie but from Martin's teenage son, Billy, and Martin's best friend, Ross, who don't know how to handle the situation.

The California Repertory Company tackles “The Goat” in its first production of the spring semester at the Royal Theatre on the Queen Mary. James Martin directs the small but able cast, which on Saturday took a little time to find its groove, but once it did, really took off.

Brian Mulligan plays Martin, an accomplished architect who just turned 50 and who has been hiding his unholy love from family and friends for months.

Though anyone who has ever been on the Internet knows there is probably a sizable support community for Martin’s, ahem, dilemma, Mulligan’s biggest challenge here is to present an utterly ridiculous situation as plausible. And that he does, though the actor’s delivery felt strained and off in the first two scenes with his wife and then his best friend. It is not until the big confrontation with the family that Mulligan seemed to hit his stride, and kept hitting it, eliciting laughs and groans from his audience.

Roma Maffia plays beleaguered wife Stevie, and like Mulligan, she too seemed to struggle with the initial scenes. This may be put down to Albee’s dialogue, which is often artificial and forced. But luckily, when Mulligan hit his groove, so did she, and it was like watching a perfectly choreographed war dance.

Maffia has an easier job than Mulligan, since she mostly has to react to the bizarreness, but she is great at showing Stevie’s incredulity transform into rage, then despair, and finally, determination.

Craig Anton plays Ross, a television reporter and Martin’s best and oldest friend. Ross is caught between his loyalty to Martin and his disgust over the situation. Had Martin fallen for another woman, Ross would have had no problem keeping quiet. But a goat?

Anton navigates his character’s self-serving attitude and ethical hypocrisy well, though he, too, flounders in the first scenes.

Tyler Bremer plays son Billy, and he jumps right into character, going from hurt child to loving son to confused adolescent, then back again, all in expert fashion. Any child who has witnessed their parents fight knows that conflicted feeling – wanting to take sides, feeling disloyal to the other party, worrying about what will happen next. The hardest

part for Billy is that his belief in his parents' marriage as a good one, and in his father as a reasonable person, has been shattered. For that matter, that is Stevie's problem, too.

As she puts it, she went into marriage preparing for anything from economic hardship to infidelity. But a goat? Who can foresee that?

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