

One-Act Play Spectacular showcases students' original works

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Each of us has a story to tell. Some of the stories are interesting, original, provocative or moving. Some of them may be derivative or, worse, boring.

Regardless, courage, patience and, yes, at least a degree of talent are necessary ingredients if one ever decides to write their story down in expectation of it being acted out on stage for an audience of strangers.

Texas Tech's Department of Theatre is to be applauded for encouraging students to write, direct and perform original works. Of the five currently being debuted at Raider Red's One-Act Play Spectacular at the campus' Lab Theatre, some are better than others. Some need work or just basic trimming.

None are boring.

Quite likely, theatergoers will depart with varied favorites. But I was captivated most by young playwright Ryan Palmer's piece called "Concordia Discors," directed by Trey Mikolasky.

Set in a trashed alley that serves as a temporary home to the homeless, the play introduces Caucasian and African-American men down on their luck played by Chuck Clay and Omar Sadigh, respectively.

Both deliver phenomenal performances, especially taking into account the dialogue and monologues written as part Beat Poetry and part street performance art, a peek at life's mysteries through smudged glasses.

Palmer's writing is intriguing primarily because he has not forsaken character in favor of showy individual sketches.

There is not only conversation shared, but intelligent views of the world exposed by these unwashed, and giving each communicative talents (playing guitar, writing) is a nifty plot device, making each character more real while avoiding cliché.

Actors and audience alike are challenged by "Concordia

Discors," and Palmer is revealed as a playwright to watch.

The ending of "The Madonna of the Rocks" is predictable, true. But there is an inherent sweetness to this play by Catherine Crosby Bigham that holds one's attention and no doubt will please the romantics.

The premise is interesting: a somewhat recently blinded woman, nicely acted by Brooke Blosser, visiting an art museum in hopes of recapturing the images she's slowly forgetting.

It is up to museum janitor Will Bigham to help and, with guidance from director Peter Damien Grueninger, Bigham becomes a nervous, self-doubting Everyman slowly recognizing beauty and opportunity as he's asked to describe Da Vinci's title painting in terms of physicality, colors and even feelings.

The playwright's use of a "M*A*S*H" reference nicely opens the door to personality, and actor Bigham is just terrific.

Michelle Mellgren's "Fate with a Capital F" is ambitious.

The dialogue, though bound to thoroughly offend the sensitive, defines both the profession and education of characters who are either prostitutes or involved with prostitutes.

Mellgren's attack on organized religion is little more than an easy pot shot fired by caricature, but Kimberly Christann Brownlee and Kimberly G. Bigsby define strengths of different measures as the whores Chippy and Kayla, respectively.

It is Chippy who has hopes that may be guided by fate, and she's more than willing to use her body to strike a bargain to make a dream come true. A gunshot finds her facing that fate with a capital F and, despite the play's uneven pacing, Mellgren at least leaves her main character a sense of acceptance.

"Stew," co-written by Julie Mitchell and Seth Marstrand and directed by Chuck Clay, struck me as both amusing and forgettable, a salute to Alfred Hitchcock, Rod Serling, Stephen King and probably a dozen others who have delivered murder mysteries with a macabre twist. Heidi Hargrove is a too obvious vixen and Todd Orenthal Goodlett a too obvious dunderhead.

This stew is not an original recipe. We've tasted it before.

And finally there is "Relief at the Receptionist's Office," written by John Trundle and directed by Michael Tuman almost as a vaudeville routine. It's funny, but the laughs depend on performances more than writing.

Happily, Will Bigham is often a hoot as the lusting patient wanting to wait (and watch and seduce) in an outer office, and Christina Hernandez has fun with exaggerated accents and actions as the receptionist.

It's a silly little piece, ending this one-act play festival on a happy note. Two hours with these five originals is time well

spent, especially for those who love the purity of theater, but "Concordia Discors" alone is worth the price of a ticket.

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Raider Red's One-Act Play Spectacular, a collection of five original one-act plays, will be staged at 8 p.m. today and 2 p.m. Sunday at Texas Tech's Lab Theatre. Reserved-seat tickets are priced at \$8 for the general public, \$5 for children age 11 and younger and senior citizens, and \$4 for Tech students. Call 742-3603 for reservations.