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FEATURED

Big names of early '50s meet in 'Insignificance'

Dragon Theatre stages unlikely meeting of big names

By Judy Richter Daily Journal correspondent Feb 2, 2018



The premise of Terry Johnson's "Insignificance," presented by Dragon Theatre, sounds like the start of a joke:

What happens when Albert Einstein, Joseph McCarthy, Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio get together?

Well, except for Monroe and DiMaggio, who once were married, it's unlikely that the four ever got together, but they do in the New York hotel room of The Professor (Jim Johnson) in about 1953.

If You Go

'Insignificance' will continue through Feb. 18 at Dragon Theatre, 2120 Broadway, Redwood City. For tickets and information call (650) 493-2006, Ext. 2, or visit dragonproductions.net.



He's first visited by The Senator (Gary Mosher), who barges in with two bottles of whiskey. Because The Professor is to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee the next morning, The Senator wants to rehearse The Professor's answers and strike a deal with him.

He leaves after The Professor quietly refuses. Shortly thereafter, The Actress (Jessica Lea Risco) bangs on his door. She's trying to escape fans pursuing her after shooting the iconic scene of Monroe standing on a subway grate while her skirt billows up.

They subsequently have a long discussion about the theory of relativity.



Next to arrive is The Ballplayer (Nick Mandracchia), who angrily demands that The Actress return home. What follow are a marital spat and discussion about the relationship.

Characters come and go throughout the next several hours. It's all quite talky, but there's not enough back story for those who aren't familiar with what was going in the early '50s, especially the Red Scare and McCarthy's efforts to root out perceived communists and communist sympathizers.

It's also puzzling why the playwright makes The Senator from Louisiana when McCarthy was from Wisconsin.



Still, direction by Laura Jane Bailey keeps things going rather smoothly, thanks in large part to Johnson's mild demeanor as The Professor and Risco's nuanced performance at The Actress. Mosher as The Senator and Mandracchia as The Ballplayer tend to bluster.

Eric Johnson's hotel room set is serviceable, but Edward Liptzin's lighting changes are sometimes abrupt. Kathleen Qiu's costumes help to define the characters. Her dress for The Actress looks a lot like Monroe's.

Running about an hour and 40 minutes with one intermission, "Insignificance" has some interesting moments, but not enough to elevate it to significant theater, nor is it appropriate for the younger set.

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