

Runaway bride hits town

Fleeing woman crashes into hermit's life

By John Angell Grant

How many women have fled town on their wedding days? Well, one for sure, and playwright Cindy Lou Johnson writes about her in the offbeat, two-character, existentially influenced 1989 play "Brilliant Traces," currently running in downtown Palo Alto, presented by Dragon Productions.

Marriage is hell, or so Rosannah DeLuce fears, as she suddenly reverses marital direction while standing in the church aisle during the ceremony, tiptoes backwards toward the door, sneaks out and hops into her car. There she proceeds to drive in a frantic trance from Arizona to Alaska in her wedding dress, stopping every five hours for gas, a restroom, a candy bar and a Coke.

Eventually she stalls out near the snowbound Alaska cabin of a solitary backwoods hermit and crashes abruptly into his life. These two lost souls, thrown together by random accident, then launch into an odd-couple examination of their mutual phobias, traumas and dreams.

This is the story of two injured people trapped together in a small cabin, trying to figure out what reality is. Each has a history of isolation.

Meredith Hagedorn is the frantic and unhinged Rosannah, fleeing her life in terror. As Rosannah understands it, she is suffering from a pain in her DNA. Slowly awakening, she fears that life has put everyone else to sleep.

Tom Gough is Henry, the backwoods cook for an oil rig, marooned in his cabin on break from work and not interested in seeing other people. The Alaskan blizzard, he believes, offers him a world in which shape and form have disappeared. He places Rosannah's satin wedding shoes in the oven and cooks them.

Although the numbers are debated, the American divorce rate appears to float around 50 percent. Couples get married as children, without understanding the challenges and responsibilities of a partnership.

In "Brilliant Traces," playwright Johnson has made an attempt to flesh out some of the intimacy fears surrounding conjugal relationships. For a long while, Rosannah and Henry don't know with whom they are fighting, although it appears they have no choice but to fight.

As they wear themselves out and share intimacies, the emotional fabric of their behaviors starts to feel like random, karmic accidents of the material world.

"Brilliant Traces" ends up feeling like a modern day American romance version of Sartre's "No Exit."

Although it is a wandering psychological tale, it is also a chick play. (Playwright Johnson wrote for the television series "The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd.")

The show's weakness is its rambling story that visits issues here and there, and overplays the existential card to beyond what the flimsy story can comfortably carry.

First-time director John T. Aney's staging sometimes emphasizes the script's more obvious psychological twists. Early on, when Rosannah passes out following her frantic initial cabin appearance, there is an effective ten minutes of silence, leaving the stunned Henry to undress and wash her, then put her to bed.

Elsewhere, it seemed a false note that there was no bad weather coming inside the cabin with Rosannah, or on her clothing as she arrived.

This is the tale of a bride on the run. It's an intriguing story device, in light of the cliché that women live to get married. I wonder, how many women have actually fled town on their wedding days? I'm guessing it's more than we realize.

Rating: Three stars

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