

Theater review: MCT brings warped humor of Shel Silverstein to life

By

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Shel Silverstein was many things in his life: gifted cartoonist, author of several delightful children's books ("The Giving Tree"), a hit songwriter ("A Boy Named Sue"), poet and playwright. In other words: He was the quintessential Renaissance man.

It's not a surprise, then, to discover he wrote many short plays (some only two-to-three minutes long) that have been bundled into a collection of witty, aptly titled sketches called "An Adult Evening of Shel Silverstein," which gets a consistently entertaining production from Mountain Community Theater and director Steve Brenner.

As with most play compilations, this one has several winners ("Bus Stop," "Buy One, Get One Free," "Blind Willie and the Talking Dog" and "One Tennis Shoe") and a few which either are not that engrossing or are stretched out longer than they need to be.

And, while it's Silverstein's verbal zingers that bring life to the scripts, they wouldn't be nearly as successful without the outlandish mugging and comic timing of MCT's actors. Nat Robinson, Kathryn Wahlberg and Jackson Wolffe are standouts, but Andrew Singleton and Janine Theodore are not far behind. (That's the entire cast other than a couple of quick walk-ons.)

Robinson and Wahlberg are particularly effective in the witty, mature-themed short called "Bus Stop." Between the two of them, they say every word known to man for "breast" and "penis." Not your typical play dialogue, especially when synonyms for those two words make up 98 percent of the dialogue. Another short uses the same technique with the words "meat and potatoes," but it wasn't nearly as effective because eventually those words just became tedious.

Wahlberg shines in every skit she's in, and Robinson shows remarkable versatility going from the foul-mouthed "Bus Stop" guy to an innocent-appearing (but deceitful) man in "Smile" and then a rather blasé New York businessman in "Wash and Dry."

Wolffe's wondrously elastic face works perfectly when he's playing an incredulous husband in "The Lifeboat is Sinking," and he's appropriately menacing in "Smile." In "Going Once," Wolffe actually has about a 12-minute monologue (with a couple of words from Theodore somewhere in the middle). That's impressive.

Actually, all cast members have at least one skit where they shine. For Singleton it's "Blind Willie and the Talking Dog," a sweet, charming end to the show. In it, Singleton demonstrates a not-too-shabby voice singing the blues.

As for Theodore, she's sharp, witty and, especially in "One Tennis Shoe," shows a good comedic talent. But she smiles too infrequently, holds her arms at awkward angles and often looks more morose than she should.

The hard-working backstage crew deserves special mention for their often-laborious hauling of tables, a stove, a bookcase and more in-and-out of the small stage of the Broadway Playhouse, which only seats 62 people.

Marcelo Siero acts as a human bookend, with brief, surprisingly effective appearances at the start and end of each act.

But it's Silverstein's bizarre and absolutely off-the-wall topics that make this play medley worth seeing. Imagine auctioning off a woman by showing her breasts and touting all the things she can "do" around the house. Then there's the sketch about a couple of hookers standing on a street corner sprouting Shakespearean verse as they advertise "Buy One, Get One Free (with an absolute money-back guarantee)."

Not family fare, for sure, but this production might help Millennials and others discover the wonderfully comic genius of Shel Silverstein. Come prepared to be offended by a number of words not found in polite company — or Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. It's a good reminder that theater, like all of life, is a potpourri of treasures.