

ReAct with: To Gillian on her 37th Birthday

Judith van Praag

Repertory Actors Theatre, Seattle's only Multiethnic Philanthropic Theatre Company starts the 2006 season with Michael Brady's "To Gillian on her 37th Birthday".

After the show opened in New York in 1983, Brady received the "Oppenheimer Prize for the Best New American Playwright". Not without reason, this is a well-wrought play, about love, loss and recovery, or as ReAct's director Davis Hsieh says, "It's a sweet little family drama, I've been wanting to stage for years."

Over the years, the actors in the cast –all of whom have been with the company from the beginning– have matured in their craft; they're ready to fill the demanding roles within a play that deals with such deep sentiments as grief over the death of a loved one: a spouse, a mother, a sister and a friend.

After Gillian's fatal boating accident, David and his daughter Rachel moved to the island where the family used to vacation.

The play starts on the eve of the second anniversary of Gillian's death. Seated on the deck, David quizzes sixteen-year-old Rachel and her friend and neighbor Cindy on names of the stars in the sky. When the girls retire for the night, David remains on the deck to converse with the spirit of his dead wife.

The following day Gillian's sister Esther and her husband Paul – convinced that the time has come for David to come out of mourning and start dating– bring along surprise guest Kevin.

Kevin "My parents really wanted a boy", a former student of David, who already had a crush on him years before, has not been told beforehand that her visit coincides with the anniversary of Gillian's death and birthday.

The subplot, childless Esther and Paul's wish to take care of

Rachel further complicate the story.

Contemplative T.J. Langley is believable as the grief struck David, and convincing when showing sudden sparks of happiness as he opens himself up to new possibilities.

Colleen Parker, who played the role of a woman grieving over her mother's death in Todd Redenius' short movie In Memory of... now tenderly portrays teenager Rachel, who worries about her father's well being, but yearns for a life among the living.

Casey Floresca (Young Waverly, in "The Joy Luck Club") is the quintessential doting teenager with a crush on her friend's father.

Leilani Berinobis (of "Sex in the City" fame) as Gillian's spirited sister Esther benefits from her comedic timing, even in this more dramatic role.

Matt Lovell, as good-hearted, joke cracking Paul, Esther's spouse, provides the comic relieve and keeps all characters connected.

Kathie Hsieh (actor, director, writer of "Sex in the City") embodies the mature, understanding –and ready for love– Kevin.

Roberta Furst, representing Gillian's spirit on stage, gives a light hearted, humorous twist to the self centered career woman Gillian must have been while alive. In the end it is Gillian's spirit, who (or that) sets David free, allowing him to care for their daughter, and to find happiness in life.

This play is suitable for all in the family (except babes in arms), and a must see for anybody confronted with grief over loss of a lost loved one.

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