

Entertainment

Female 'Odd Couple' - a funny start to Candlelight's summer

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By Christina Perryman

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Sometimes opposites attract...and sometimes they can drive you crazy! Neil Simon's classic play, "The Odd Couple," explores the relationship between two best friends – one an unapologetic slob, the other a neurotic neat freak – and the toll their personalities take on that relationship when the pair move in together. Oscar Madison and Felix Unger, however, receive a more complete transformation in "The Odd Couple (female version)," now on stage at The Candlelight Theatre, excellently directed by Bob Kelly.

Instead of Oscar and Felix, the audience is introduced to Olive and Florence. The show opens not on poker night, but on the weekly ladies only Trivial Pursuit game. The group of friends is concerned because Florence, a real stickler for punctuality, is late. The reason for her absence becomes clear with a call from Florence's husband, Sidney, explaining Florence went missing after he asked her for a divorce. Florence eventually shows up at Olive's apartment, distressed, disoriented and fretting over the future. Olive has a seemingly perfect solution – Florence can stay with Olive for the time being. Soon, Florence's neat freak tendencies push Olive to the breaking point and even the distraction of two handsome Spaniards cannot keep Olive from wanting to kill her best friend. Ultimately, the ladies realize that even the best of friends sometimes need space.

I can't put my finger exactly on why, but I found the female version of "The Odd Couple," much funnier than the original. A large part of that could be the performances of Victoria Healy as Olive and Gerri Weagraff as Florence. Healy and Weagraff are incredibly funny yet relatable. Healy's Olive is relaxed, sarcastic and sloppy but underneath is a big old softie who doesn't want to see a friend hurting and still supports her undeserving ex-husband. Weagraff, meanwhile, is more uptight, fearful and even controlling, although she does everything with the best of intentions. The actresses play off each other very well and their mannerisms and expressions are hilarious.

The show has an outstanding supporting cast comprised of Lindsay Mauck, Erin Waldie, Tiffany Christopher and Kate Graham. Dan Healy and Anthony Connell provide a nice shot of testosterone and charm as brothers Manolo and Jesus Costazuela.

Kelly's set is doubly perfect. In the first act, the stage is messy and disorganized, a nice reflection of Olive's character. During intermission, the stage is transformed to neat as a pin, this time reflecting Florence's influence. The little details made all the difference – gone were Olive's sports posters and pictures, replaced with paintings and flowers, new curtains took the place of broken blinds, etc. Timm Cannon's costumes were also well done, again accurately reflecting the characters, and Olive's dress for the big date with Manolo and Jesus was gorgeous. Wigs and hair were well done by Lisa Miller-Saunders.

If You Go:

"The Odd Couple" (female version) is on a limited run at The Candlelight Theatre, 2208 Millers Road, Wilmington, Del., until June 22. Show times are Friday and Saturday evenings at 7:30 p.m. (doors open at 6:30 p.m.) and 2:30 p.m., Sundays (doors open at 1:30). Tickets are \$30 which includes a cheese and crackers appetizer.

For tickets or information, call 302-475-2313 or visit www.NCTstage.org.

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