

Lovers leap in StageQ's *Queer Shorts*

Match games

Bruce G. Bradley, Isthmus: The Daily Page, Friday, 06/20/2008



The third edition of *Queer Shorts*, presented by StageQ, is subtitled *All You Need Is Love*, a fitting epithet for the 11 brief comedies and dramas that constitute a most enjoyable evening's entertainment.

Culled from over 300 submissions from around the country (though none, according to producer Tara Ayres, from local playwrights), the one-act plays run the entire gamut of romantic entanglements. There is a definite queer bias in the stories, of course, but these tales are universal in the way they address the hopes and fears, joys and terrors, expectations and failures of that crazy little thing called love.

The evening kicks off in fine style with the witty "Don't Toy With Me," involving two dolls whose greatest regret is that they are "not anatomically correct." It's a charming reminder that playing with Ken and G.I. Joe may have been just as influential in some boys' development as Barbie was to some girls.

At the conclusion of the cycle of plays, the theme of hero worship returns in a more adult way in "Man in Peril," with the most unlikely pairing of knight and damsel you will probably ever see. It's a fitting counterpart to the opening play, rounding out the evening in comic style.

Wedged between these bookends is an ambitious array of stories, some more successfully executed than others. Most memorable are "The Dykeutante," a delicious volte-face scene where a young girl's confession of lesbianism to her Baptist parents has unexpected results; "Paris," which movingly chronicles the desperate insecurities that intimacy can reveal; "Call Girl," a sly observation on the meaning of honesty; and "Acting Out," which humorously explores the nature of identity.

The quality of the acting fluctuates, but there is no lack of enthusiasm and commitment. Of particular note are Scott Albert Bennett, Paula Orton, Ray Olderman, Bob Sylvester, and Katy Conley and Molly Vanderlin, whose relationship in "Paris" is the emotional highlight of the evening.

A packed house on opening night commiserated with every calamity and cheered every kiss. This was one "friendly" audience that was obviously very happy to get into these snug little shorts.