

Friday, June 10, 2011

A shout-out to the '70s

With the priceless Leslie Hull leading the way, 'Gemini' finds high-decibel fun in Philly

by Paul Wozniak



Albert Innaurato's personalized tragic-comedy 'Gemini' plays out in Italian-dominated South Philadelphia (although it could easily be transferred to Boston, the Bronx, Brooklyn or parts of New Jersey). With dialogue mostly shouted and all the physicality essential to Italian speech, "Gemini" is the ideal kick-off production for Michigan State University's Summer Circle Theatre season: loud, sometimes poignant and very funny.

Set in 1973, 'Gemini' follows a day in the life of seven interconnected characters as they forge through issues of love given and unrequited, sexual identity, body image and, of course, the zodiac. To describe the story further is to give away important revelations. To director Rob Roznowski's credit, "Gemini" feels less like a theatrical time capsule than it could. The character revelations and developments are relevant enough to avoid blank stares from younger viewers. Roznowski keeps the show moving along swiftly with flawless timing, particularly during explosive scenes at the end of Acts One and Two.

The numerous script failings, however, are beyond Roznowski's control, including character monologues filled with over-obvious metaphors. In an ensemble production from the '70's, every character apparently must verbalize an explanation for their actions, but for audiences, "Gemini" moves like a family reunion. It feels like there are fun relatives around, but inevitably you are momentarily stuck talking to the weirdo cousin everyone avoids. Politeness rather than interest holds

you in their grasp until that necessary distraction provides your exit.

In "Gemini," Leslie Hull is that necessary distraction. As Bunny, the neighborhood drama-queen, Hull completely commits herself to uninhibited physicality, turning a scene of staged drunkenness into memorable hilarity. Hull masterfully blends her character's inner torment with unaware playfulness.

Nicholas Dressel rarely steals scenes as Fran Geminiani, a middle-aged Philly father with skin rashes, but he does provide strong support. Dressel's charming smile perfectly suits Fran's easygoing persona, which becomes humorously unhinged at the sight of bad table manners.

Graham Lundeen, Claudia Dibbs and Chris Robinson as home-from-college Harvard students believably relay their romantic entanglements and finally shine during their fluidly choreographed showdown in the second half.

Ian Paige and Brittane Rowe understandably struggle with their oddball characters, one in arrested development and the other in arrested domesticity, but each finds their moments to stand out.

"Gemini" marks the first Summer Circle show to utilize body microphones to correct the long-standing problem of dialogue being lost outside. Ironically, the microphones are hardly needed, considering virtually every line is shouted. "Gemini" does benefit from a stunning two-story set of a brick fa'ade, one with plenty of doors and windows from which to scream, thanks to designer Zac Campbell.

Like the reality television of today, "Gemini's" most enjoyable moments come from its most dynamic characters, the ones that swear, attempt suicide and overeat at the same volume.

'Gemini'

MSU Summer Circle Theatre

Continues 8 p.m. Friday, June 10, and Saturday, June 11

Outdoor theater behind the MSU Auditorium, along the Red Cedar River

Free

Share

0

0

Like