



## Living Out Lacks Luster

by Michael C. Sherrin

A touching play about class divisions and ethnic groups, *Living Out* compares the upper-middle class with the work force of ethnic nannies from all over Latin America. This humorous drama effectively uses the two classes to criticize the other, nicely treading the line between stereotypes and insults.

*Living Out* tells of Ana Hernandez (Mariela Lopez-Ponce), a nanny working to bring her oldest son to America from El Salvador. After interviewing for a number of positions, Hernandez learns that having her youngest son in the states hurts her chances of getting a job, so she lies and lands a position with Dale Place and Rachel Harker (Richard Robin and Nancy Robin), taking care of their infant.

*Living Out* somewhat achieves the success it aims for, though it almost succumbs to the *Cider House Rules* Syndrome (when a work of fiction has so many themes you can't figure out what it is about). It deals with class divisions, ethnic stereotypes, immigration ethics, family life, parental responsibility, honesty and a couple more for extra flavor. Surprisingly though, it does not feel diluted. The bigger themes play off each other keeping things simple yet deep. Playwright Lisa Loomer manages to say a great deal in a calm, natural voice.

The most effective part of *Living Out* is the humor. Though it is not a comedy, it is at its best when the yuppies of LA's West Side discuss how to hire a caretaker: "Good god, everyone is from El Salvador. What happened to all the Mexicans?"

Interlude scenes take place in the park where the nannies and the mothers meet their brethren for unforgettable comedic moments. One of the hired help complains that her employer makes her feed tofu to the child, so she buys the kid a doughnut with her own money. One mother believes "boys should be able to wear salmon" because she does not believe in color coding for gender.

The direction by Lois Roach fails to present the simple yet active script without causing headaches. Roach makes numerous attempts at inventive staging that cause distractions and confusion. Some scenes are played out using

a split stage which does not work because both sides are moving at the same time. While Place and Harker discuss the new nanny, we also see Ana and her husband making out in their own little scene. It becomes impossible to concentrate on the important conversation between Place and Harker, especially since they are center stage with the Hernandezes only a straddle away.

Roach also had Ana Hernandez split herself between two scenes, speaking to her husband on one side and Harker on the other. While nicely written, Roach has Parker running on and off the stage with apparent strain. Similarly, the talented Lopez-Ponce seems to struggle from her own jumping back and forth. The lightning does not change enough and Lopez-Ponce seemed bewildered as to where Harker is going to pop out next.

Overall the technical aspects of the play are poor. The lighting for the park makes it look like a jungle out of *Where the Wild Things Are* instead of sunny Los Angeles. A sound effect that is supposed to be a coffee machine sounds like a train running next to the ocean. On a good note, even though the baby dolls used for all the infants in the play are somewhat distracting, the real thing would have been far worse.

As good a script as *Living Out* is, it struggles with wanting to be a drama while forgetting that it is truly effective as a comedy. When revelations start happening and we approach the climax, one is only left to wonder simply about what the heck happened. The tone changes drastically without foreshadowing or good pacing, and secrets are revealed that the audience doesn't realize they needed to find out. The ending, nevertheless, gets some of the emotion it wants, though it would matter more with foreshadowing and a consistently even dose of comedy and drama. Or just stick with the comedy.

*Living Out* is playing at the Lyric Stage through April 23. For more information, call the box office at (617) 437-7172 or go to [www.lyricstage.com](http://www.lyricstage.com).

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## NEW PERFORMANCE IN HARVARD SQUARE

With the takeover of the Hasty Pudding Building by Harvard, the American Repertory Theatre (ART) needed to look for another performance space. Enter the Zero Arrow Street Theater. This new building represents a confluence of the arts and increasing public awareness of social issues.

Robert Orchard, Executive Director of ART, wants the theater "to speak to younger groups of organizations that cross disciplines such as art, music and poetry." The genesis for the concept of the new space came from Orchard himself, based on his experience of seeing Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in an experimental Budapest theater.

At the Budapest performance all 300 audience members sat on swings surrounded by actors on the same level; the "swinging" audience then turned to position themselves to view the stage action. This is the kind of cutting-edge innovation that Mr. Orchard envisioned for the Zero Arrow Theatre; a space without a fixed proscenium and the flexibility for unlimited intellectual and artistic expression.

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