

Review: "My Thing of Love"
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Show: My Thing of Love
Company: In The Basement Productions
Venue: The Lowry Lab Theater, Saint Paul

This is the first play that I've gone to in a while that I wasn't directly involved with. Now, a bit of a disclaimer: while I am not directly involved with the show, I am a member of In The Basement Productions. For that reason you could assume that this review is slightly biased. However, because I did not work on the show in any way, I think I can look at it somewhat objectively. Okay... Here we go!

In The Basement Productions is in the midst of a season that is all about "Love...with a twist." They kicked the season off with The Balcony Scene, which was part of the 2006 Fringe Festival and played at the BLB. It told the story of a quirky and dysfunctional love in a beautiful way thanks to the direction of Andy Chambers.

My Thing of Love was directed by Claire Avitable. She, like Chambers, tackled a darkly comic dysfunctional relationship, but while the ITBP fringe show dealt with the beginning of relationships, Avitable's creation studies the end of a marriage. And yet, even in a show that takes on such a harsh and painful time as that, it finds the quirky humor deftly.

The action surrounds a character named Ellie, who's just confronted her husband about an affair he's been carrying on behind her back. He flails about under the accusations, promises not to stray again, then does so when his wife goes on a trip to spend time with a friend. All Hell breaks loose briefly and things seem to take a dangerous turn when Ellie enters with a rowboat oar.

Avitable's directors notes describe her reaction to the play as looking through a peep hole and watching real people in a real crisis. And it is true that the very true to life realism of the script is a huge part of the show. And a couple of the actors kept up with the brilliance of the script: specifically, Jen Usellis who played Ellie. Ellie was originally played by Laurie Metcalf at Steppenwolf (in Chicago) and later on Broadway. Usellis apparently has a direct line on Metcalf's style of slightly off-kilter, because she nailed this part and nailed many of the patterns of behavior that Metcalf's characters have shown in shows like Roseanne and more recently on Desperate Housewives.

The rest of the cast was solid, if not stellar. The script and the performance of Ellie do make me recommend the show highly.

Also, I need to mention that this is a great chance to take in the brand-spankin'-new Lowry Lab Theatre. Yay!

—Chris Kidder