

Pork Filled Players - New Show Trimmed of all Excess Lard.

Judith van Praag

Since I don't eat pork, and a sense of humor is so subjective, I almost turned down the assignment to write a review about the latest performance by the Pork Filled Players. I'm glad that I let go of my culinary and thespian prejudices, and watched "In the Mood for Lard (make lard not war)" by the Northwest's longest running Asian American sketch comedy group.

Not only did I get out of bed one early Sunday morning to watch the Players rehearse, PFP got me —old couch potato— out of the house on a Saturday evening, only to find a wonderful array of couches to choose from at the Actors' Studio Cabaret Space.

Afraid that I would get too cozy and comfortable, with the danger of drifting off (besides, I didn't have someone to cuddle up with), I chose a straight-backed chair in front of a church bench where two Russian ladies and their male companion had planted their tush for the evening.

The words sketch comedy may throw you off, after all, something sketchy is usually superficial, without debt, not much more than an idea. While in reality sketch comedy is quite the opposite and may be compared to a good base for a sauce; a lovely stock, skimmed off fat, then reduced to its essence. Sketch comedy at its best will throw you off, because the expected doesn't happen, while what you do get makes you smile, or laugh, or roll over.

There's no need to worry about falling asleep when the Pork Filled Players present their goods. Actress and writer Yvette Zaepfel (whose only Asian credentials consist of a 10 day childhood trip to China) called the full house to attention— we weren't going to be left behind while the actors did their spiel. According to the eager "Yeah!" in response to Yvette's question, "Are you willing?" everybody was ready to be entertained. As we were by the six players engaged in "Bacon whoopie & other participatory sports", pondering the secrets of female arousal, fantasy male exotic dancers, slutty fairy godmothers, and a Godfather named after champagne, who provides

'protection' to gay couples.

With great aplomb Yvette introduced former child actor Ed Tonai ("The Baseball Bunch") as "One Hot Cook", and Mok Moser (Theatre Babylon's "Jesus Christ Superstar"), as the man who knows how to please a woman. What might have been mistaken for a vulgar gesture was immediately understood as something far more mundane, when Mok handed Yvette what -I imagine- she had asked him to get at the store. I don't want to give away any jokes, but that was the first of a double -mood setting- entente, if there ever was one. And the audience ate it up.

In PFP's 15th show, veteran actor/writer and assistant director Tony Colinares (Northern Exposure), and veteran actress Dixi Lee (of Sex in Seattle fame) are joined by Bellevue High School junior Emmy Walker, a promising young actress who didn't miss a beat.

Aided by excellent comedic timing, the group members swept the audience along through about 30 short scenes. From the "Ten Second Iron Chef" to the "Vice Prevention Squad", issues range from interracial marriage to old folks looking back at their life. The text is lean -trimmed of all excess lard- and the Pork Filled Players show enthusiastic dedication to their chosen art form. And that's exactly what makes an audience agree to follow performers all the way.

As much as I wished to maintain the role of critical reviewer, I just couldn't keep a straight face. Backed by the laughter of the Russian Trio behind me (and what a challenge to make people of another culture laugh!), I had as much fun as any other person in the audience. An hour and a half after the team started, I was surprised to see them take their bows.

Compliments go to director Linda Lombardi, for whom this was the first venture into the world of sketch comedy, to co-founder, executive producer/ writer "bad ass stage manager" and sound guy Roger Tang, for keeping his comedic baby alive and kicking, as well as lighting designer/ writer Maggie Lee who put everyone in the right (day or night) light.

The Pork Filled Players perform "In the Mood for Lard" (make

lard not war) every Friday and Saturday until Feb. 26th, at 8:00 P.M. at the Northwest Actors' Studio, 1100 East Pike Street, Seattle. Tickets are \$12 general, \$9 students/groups/ couples in love. For tickets (206)325-6500 or www.ticketwindowonline.com

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