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39... and Ticking!

Dates and Venue 14 - 17 October 2009 at 8pm | Shadbolt Centre for the Arts, Burnaby

Director Sharon Heath **Musical Director** Bill Costin **Choreography** Tara Cheyenne Friedenber

Reviewer John Jane

Rose, a single woman whose biological clock is ticking furiously, is the protagonist of Sharon Heath's brand new musical comedy *39 ... and Ticking!* presented by Full Figure Theatre at Burnaby's Shadbolt Centre for the Arts. The action takes place in Rose's apartment. Though, just about all the dialogue takes place in her overworked imagination.

Rose pines for a child and would like to get pregnant; preferably with the support of a man she loves, although, this is not an essential component of her plan.

Rose has constant voices pervading her head that are easy to summon, but seemingly impossible to dismiss. These surreal conversations are frequently in conflict with her own rational (yet, thankfully sung in harmony) and feature the people who already have an emotional impact on her life.

Her carefree best friend Mattie (played with fearless abandon by Lisa Bunting) provides the voice of spontaneity; her mother (Joan MacLean) dispenses sensible counsel and encourages her to undertake the traditional marriage option. The voices of her boyfriend Dan and her psycho analyst (both roles played by Cheryl Mullen) add further confusion.

The entire first act envelopes the three minutes needed, though the audience is required to sit for about seventy minutes, to obtain the results of a pregnancy test. In the interim, Rose has to figure out how she is going to dump her boyfriend and sperm donor if the test is positive. The play switches precariously from real time to Rose's uncertain future and enlarged mental flashbacks.

Lisa Beley is totally convincing as the "wannabe" mother. Joan MacLean, Cheryl Mullen and Lisa Bunting cover all the bases as the myriad of Rose's quixotic voices. Mullen justifies some canny casting as Rose's zany boyfriend. MacLean, who also collaborates with Ted Hamilton in scoring the original music, grounds the show with a solid performance as the redoubtable Mom. I personally enjoyed Bunting's delightfully uninhibited burlesque in the show's most engaging songs like Confession (Boy, we've had a lot of sex).

Bill Costin deserves special praise for his dogged on-stage accompaniment on the twenty new songs, many of which reprised throughout the show and Tara Cheyenne Friedenber's sui generis choreography is an intriguing element.

On the production side, the mise-en-scene is astutely multi-functional. The emphatic use of the colour red provides a dramatic visual impact, presumably used for its strong symbolic reference to love, life and vitality - or perhaps, just because it's the director's favourite colour.

The production is not totally without shortcomings. The first act could be ten minutes shorter, without sacrificing anything in the pacing and I found Rose's bathroom birthing scene in the second act to be a little discomforting.

These failings are hardly considerable in an otherwise well-executed piece of theatre.

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