

NEWS

“Why We Have A Body” by square product theatre review

By **MARK COLLINS** |

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If you go **THREE STARS**

What: square product theatre’s “Why We Have a Body”

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays, through Oct. 24

Where: Dairy Center for the Arts, 2590 Walnut St., Boulder

Tickets: \$15-\$17 (two for one Thursdays)

Info: 303-444-7328 or squareproducttheatre.org

Parent’s Guide: Adult themes

It’s not giving away the ending to “Why We Have a Body” to start with an explanation of one part of that ending.

When Eleanor, the mother character in the four-woman show, says there should be a statute of limitations for blaming parents for our problems, it’s a startling idea, and one that’s at the heart of the comedy.

The play wonders: Is there anything more bewildering, maybe more terrifying, ultimately more exhilarating than figuring out who you are, and then taking responsibility for being that person?

To a great extent, that’s what each of the four characters in Claire Chafee’s whimsical and poetic play is trying to do. Boulder’s square product theatre is giving the play a fine regional premiere at the Dairy Center for the Arts.

It starts with a stick up. Mary (Emily K. Harrison) is an escaped convict with an ability to send telepathic faxes, who is pulling her piece at a 7-Eleven.

Her sis, Lili (Shana Cordon), is a private eye — a lesbian who knew she preferred the fairer sex by the time she was 3. Renee (Michelle Moore), a paleontologist, never understood how not to lead when dancing with a man, and is intrigued with Lili, enough to question her marriage.

Mom (Laurie Lynch) is an eccentric who’s taken up exploring the globe now that the kids are grown. She spends most of the play chiming in from far flung parts.

Chafee’s storytelling is nimble and fluid. The play comes at us in a collage of scenes, situations and ideas, as time and location move back and forth, like a frolicsome dream.

First produced in 1993, some of the pop cultural references in “Why We Have a Body” feel dated, but they nevertheless blend in the dialogue with feminist theory and clever observations.

Lili says at one point, she always had trouble “living in the world of the girl,” when what that was prescribed to be — cutesy, frilly things — seemed absurd to her. Instead, she was drawn to young Jodi Foster, young Tatum O’Neal and Miss Hathaway, that mannish, can-do spinster on “The Beverly Hillbillies.”

Sometimes, plays get indulgent and tedious when characters engage in soul searching or have identity crises before our eyes. Chafee’s quirky sensibility, and the performances of the square product cast, however, make all the self- exploration more than palatable.

Harrison earns laughs just by moving her eyes from one side to another. Cordon’s steady performance gives the production its foundation. Moore easily transforms from staid scientist to a woman who’s ignited something deep inside herself. Each time Lynch’s laugh fills the theater as the playful Eleanor, you can’t help but laugh with her.

And so it’s a poignant moment when Lynch, as Eleanor, leaves her laughter behind and admits she doesn’t know what she did to influence Mary to follow a life of crime. She’s sure she hurt Lili in some way too, but isn’t clear how.

Mostly, mom realizes she’s not the woman she was when her daughters were young and impressionable. And so what do we do when life moves on and we’re left with fragments of memories or faded impressions?

Eleanor forgives herself, keeps moving, exploring and finding reasons to laugh. So do her daughters.

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