



WARREN GERDS

## Critic at Large

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A play with the title of “With This Ring” sounds like it will be about marriage or a wedding. No, no, no, that’s not the case with the new play at The Machickanee Players. Homegrown playwright Kathy Campshure has mirth in mind. Her play’s ring is magical. Get this: When worn by a man, the ring creates feminine touches in him; when worn by a woman, she suddenly does guy things. It’s fun sitting in an audience listening to the reactions this play creates. Many times, the reaction is all-out laughter.

The story is about a salesman who is headed into a big presentation to pitch a campaign for a new product to his company’s new CEO. Like his example man in his presentation, salesman Robert Jones is the father of a bride-to-be. Robert has been out of the picture while his wife and daughter have made all the wedding decisions. He needs to score with his presentation to be able to pay for the big shebang. Robert is an old-line guy. He says things about male-female roles that... let’s put it this way: There’s always a dismissive female murmur in the audience when he speaks. Playwright Kathy Campshure is putting Robert’s foot in his mouth to set him up for scenes in which the hilarity simply rolls.

Through a series of goofy machinations, various people wear the ring and their behaviors change. I’ll use just one example: Robert’s neighbor, Pete, is a poker buddy who is on the scene because it’s poker day. Pete is a regular guy – hole in a knee of his jeans, rumpled hair, T-shirt, boots loosely tied and come-see, come-saw about life. When he is talked into wearing the ring, Pete suddenly sits with his knees together, fusses with a bit of disarray on the table and says such things as, “Oh, you have new curtains,” as he gets up to admire the window curtains and touch them with care and add, “I love the floral pattern.”

Aside from the magical ring, there’s a joke that’s in the show from the get go. On stage is a display that shows the first page of Robert’s presentation. The product he’s pitching is a “new energy additive for a ‘younger’ middle-age man.” The product is PEA, an acronym for something that makes sense when read. But if you say “pea” aloud... you get the picture. Playwright Kathy Campshure runs the word around the stage in a whole bunch of jokes.

As with other Campshure plays I’ve seen, “With This Ring” has interesting ‘what ifs’. Campshure likes to explore human nature, basically through ordinary people. One of the beauties of new plays is not knowing where they are going: As an audience member, you are on a fresh adventure. With Campshure, the adventure is filled with humor and playful teases about people being themselves, whether they can help it or not. All this is saying I really like “With This Ring.”

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