

Actors Bridge Ensemble's 'The Ice Treatment' offers much more than slick comedy

Amy Stumpff, For The Tennessean 6:03 p.m. CDT July 16, 2016



(Photo: Photo by Shane Burkeen)

I could tell you that Nate Eppler's new play "The Ice Treatment" is funny and thought-provoking. But if you've ever had the pleasure of seeing Eppler's work, you already know that.

But what you might not expect is the way this smart comedy — which balances big laughs with delicious bits of profundity — sneaks up and grabs you by the heart.

The play's pedigree has been widely touted — born at the Nashville Repertory Theatre Ingram New Works Project and now being produced by Actors Bridge Ensemble, a company known for presenting provocative and socially relevant premieres.

But for those who may have missed the buzz, "The Ice Treatment" follows the world's most infamous Olympic figure skater as she struggles to reinvent herself as a screenwriter. Armed with an old video camera, two actors she hired from Craigslist and some plastic fashion dolls, she sets out tell her story — her way.

Eppler reportedly wrote "The Ice Treatment" with Rachel Agee in mind, and she rewards him with an unforgettable performance. She is absolutely fearless as "Blondie," delivering her lines with impeccable timing and unflinching energy. And in a role that could easily be played strictly for laughs, Agee digs deep, giving us an unconventional hero that is at once pitiable and perverse.

Amanda Card also is excellent as Player One, a forthright young woman who's not afraid to challenge Blondie's delusional tale. Card also makes easy work of the various roles she must play in Blondie's screenplay — including an abusive mother, a Latvian coach and more.

As the more dimwitted Player Two, Antonio P. Nappo also takes on multiple roles — from Blondie's libidinous love interest "Slug Nut" to a long-forgotten Russian cosmonaut. His delivery of the "perfect narrative package" is but one hilarious highlight.

It should be noted that there's a fair amount of bad "play-acting" as Blondie and her hired helpers seek to recreate the pivotal moments of her life. These marvelous bits of after-school-special-style theatrics serve to amplify both the humor and the desperation of Blondie's situation.

Likewise, the use of action figures to illustrate the media's warped perception of Blondie and her nemesis "Princess Teeth" is surely a stroke of genius. Kudos to Eppler and the entire production team for galvanizing this wildly imaginative script with thoughtful direction and sharp technical elements.

But just as Blondie must confront her own shortcomings and disappointments, Eppler forces his audience to do the same. After all, who hasn't felt overlooked, unappreciated and generally short-changed by life at some point?

Eppler may not offer any easy answers, but he certainly poses some interesting questions. With dark humor and surprisingly relatable characters, "The Ice Treatment" might just melt your heart.

If you go

What: Actors Bridge Ensemble presents the World Premiere of "The Ice Treatment"

When: Through July 24. Performances at 7:30 p.m., Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays; 4 p.m., Sundays.

Where: Belmont's Black Box Theater, 1575 Compton Ave., Nashville

Tickets: \$25 (\$30 at door)

Contact: www.tinyurl.com/icetreatment (<http://www.tinyurl.com/icetreatment>)

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