

Assholes & Aureoles

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As the economy struggles, it's difficult to justify a night out on the town, but if you indulge your theatrical appetite a little, the Midtown International Theatre Festival offers a vast selection of entertainment opportunities. And if you're searching for a sure thing to stimulate your comedy palette, **Assholes & Aureoles**, presented by InterAction Theater, Inc. & Off The Leash Productions, LLC, will sate your craving. Playwright, Eric Pfeffinger, has composed eight independent scenes which exploit status, situations, and conflicting character objectives. Infused with his humorous language, the evening evolves as a comedic exercise in character transformations. **Assholes & Aureoles** is a zany, sketch comedy presented in hyper-drive concluding in just about an hour.

Leading this circus-act of clowning, complete with tutu and sequin dress-up, are Karen Irwin and Diane Kondrat. The women work these eight comedic scenes through seamless transitions and polished character modulations. The first scene, *A Short Scene*, is like a setup for the evening's long joke; it establishes the tone for the rest of the sketches. There's something cute and light-hearted about the bond between the mother and daughter at first, but then we're jerked into a new understanding of the relationship that's seemingly absurd and taboo.

Situational humor induces the third scene, *A Different Short Scene*, a mundane job interview, into bedlam. Diane plays an uptight interviewer looking for the right candidate to fill the position, while Karen interviews for the job. Once again, Pfeffinger engages the audience into an ostensibly ordinary verbal exchange, until the tables are turned and Karen's interview becomes about her need for a urine drug test right there in the office.

The highlight of the *Eight Works of Art*, as the program is titled, is the fifth scene, *The Domestic Violence Scene aka "The Long One."* We're taken into the women's shelter, "Transition House," where a pre-screening of Clarissa's (Karen Irwin) potential as a volunteer is already underway. The taut-jawed social worker (Diane Kondrat) incites a role-playing activity in order to test Clarissa's abilities to handle any domestic abuse situation that walks in the front door. What ensues is a raucous battle of the broads that escalates to such momentum and absurdity that teeters on farce. Blow after blow, the women contrive new alter-egos and dynamics to one-up each other in an audacious display of physical comedy. Then we're drop-kicked back into reality with a telephone ring.

The final scene, *The Last Scene*, touches on the topic of unmentionable vernacular vulgarities, what is politically correct, and what it truly means to identify with one's ethnicity. By playing dress-up throughout the scene, Pfeffinger's concept and words are articulated visually. As the women drape themselves with more and more ridiculous accessories, they continue to discuss political correctness. They become so entangled in the language that they end up spiraling into a fight using the PC terms they're created.

Leonora Trey has directed a physically dynamic realization of Eric Pfeffinger's impudent and insightful script. InterAction Theater, Inc. & Off The Leash Productions, LLC's **Assholes & Aureoles** indeed makes you wonder are they demons or angels to be tampering with our delicate social sensibilities. Well, one thing is for certain, the whimsical romp with these two vivacious women is definitely worth getting yourself to see.