

# THEATRESCENE. NET

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## ACTS OF LOVE

By: *Eugene Paul*



Changes take place over time in the Theater, lengths of shows, act divisions, points of view reflecting the current shape and flow of our society, not only in content but the way it is presented. *ACTS OF LOVE* is so handsomely done that you are not at first aware that you are watching the kind of play which enjoyed many a long run back a couple of generations ago.

Recently, there seems a trend of revival of the kind of play which is there primarily to be enjoyed and perhaps also to pique your brain cells. Here, we are in enjoyment phase, thanks to a cast that works beautifully with their play – for it has become their play – and a director who has brought them to that happy state, but even more conjunctively, with sets, costumes and lighting a integral part of the blend. In fact, Aaron Mastin, the set designer, has given us a setting which translates the strengths and foibles of the play so closely, it seems almost inevitably to be there before us, rather than a designer's product. Example: we are used to seeing, particularly in less elaborately financed productions, a doorway or a window which should go somewhere but does not. Actors suddenly become actors instead of characters and go off to nowhere or look out at nothing. There is such a door in this set, but it exactly matches the playwright's own suspension of reality and as such is too true to be good. Let's back up.

Ed, spare, white bearded, and Sheila, younger and still attractive, have come to their lake house for a weekend celebration of their twentieth wedding anniversary. They have invited Ed's son, Tom, late thirties, and Tom's girl friend, Annie to share the time with them, even though Ed, a practicing curmudgeon, finds constant fault with Tom in almost everything, especially his string of girl friends one after another. The young people arrive and Annie seems likely to be a keeper. But when Annie and Sheila are left alone, we discover that they have already known each other, and, of course, we find out they have known each other much too well. Further revelations among the relationships of the four of them make the celebratory aspect of the weekend highly ironic, such as the death of Tom's brother, also, the death of Tom's mother, whose ominous portrait hangs above the fire place, and has, presumably these twenty years of Sheila's and Ed's wedded bliss. Things are sticky and getting stickier.

What is marvelous about all this is that every single member of the cast is so invested in his or her character, they drive the story along as earnestly as director Marc Geller has demanded of them and they carry the audience with them. They transcend their material and the overly sympathetic set with the door that is a black hole. They make everything work. We are caught up in their moments pell mell, one after the other, right up until playwright Kathryn Chetkovich's too pat ending. Chetkovich, with a little more in the way of guts can take this play into a higher realm, now that her cast and director have shown her the way. I hope she does so. I admired Andrew Dawson, Diane Tyler, Andrew Rein and Abby Doyle greatly. They had me rooting for them. You will, too.

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*ACTS OF LOVE*. At the Lion Theater, 410 W. 42 St. Mon., Wed.-Sat. 8 pm. Sat.2 pm mat. Sun. 7 pm. Thru Dec. 16. Tickets \$45 at [ticketcentral.com](http://ticketcentral.com) or 212-279-4200.