

"The Next Reunion" □ □ □ □ Society Hill Playhouse □ □ □ □ May 13 - June 20



Let's face it: high school reunions are not for everyone. The invitation arrives in the mail and most people toss it straight into the trashcan, citing the obvious excuses—

*I'll be out of town*

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*I can't get a sitter*

,

*I'm too busy scrapbooking*

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In reality, it's often fear that keeps many folks away; at the same time, though, it's curiosity that suckers many people in.

Either way a reunion is one big mystery.

Well, there's no mystery about *The Next Reunion*. Energized by a charming cast, a fast-paced plot, and quick-witted dialogue, this new production is a first-rate comedy and a sure-fire crowd pleaser.

The story follows three former high school misfits: the once and future smart-ass Craig; his only friend, the overly shy and relatively unnoticed Jake; and the former black-clad goth-girl Betsy. They return for their school's ten year reunion only to discover not much has changed: outcasts then, outcasts now.

Rather than sticking around their own party, the trio decides to crash a pair of reunions taking place next door, stealing names from guest lists and wheedling their way past check-in desks with one absurd lie after another.

Each hilarious case of "identity theft" sets off another round of laughter in this rollicking comedy.

Like an ill-advised teenage prank awry, their innocent role-playing charade quickly escalates into a highly-amusing, no-holds-barred game of one-upsmanship with each predicament becoming more outrageous—and outrageously funnier—than the one before.

The cast delivers the laughs in a big way. Craig is the high school graduate who, even in early adulthood, has never quite shed his sophomoric ways.

In this role, Christopher Handschuch channels an early David Spade as he accentuates the character's maddening dichotomy: he's incredibly endearing yet incredibly annoying.

In contrast to Craig, Jake is mature, reflective, vulnerable...and blessed with amazing rhythm on the dance floor.

(Now that's a scene you have to see!)

The easily likeable Jake Blouch meshes his dramatic instincts with a casual comedic touch. He not only unveils his character's insecurities with great subtlety but also dryly snaps off clever comebacks with the same degree of competence.

His character perfectly complements Betsy, the reunion's ugly duckling—once homely, but now the Homecoming Queen.

Played by the delightful Nora Fitzgerald, Betsy is both sassy and sincere, and commands the show at several turns.

Making his theatrical debut, writer/director Larry McKenna crafts a story that moves along quickly, humorously and in a few scenes poignantly. Armed with a lethal combination of Irish wit and locker room sensibilities, McKenna throws joke after joke at the audience, unleashing a steady stream of verbal digs, clever punch lines and enough innuendo to make Austin Powers proud. His play is not overly sophisticated; it's just funny. After all, those seeking deeper meaning, McKenna warns in the program, should look elsewhere. This caveat, however, is more Twain than truth, for there's a sweet, sentimental subplot that nicely balances out the slapstick.

Overall, if you are simply seeking a good time and hoping for something funny, look no further than this play. Don't hold out for the Save the Date from your high school's alumni association, just get down to Society Hill Playhouse and crash *The Next Reunion* now.

Thomas J. Neary

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