

The Sweet Stuff

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Chased by an Elephant Theatre Co.

The Sweet Stuff

By: **Jayme McGhan**

Directed by: **Emily Cherry**

Gritty Drama Boasts Fine Performances and a Superb Script.

I often don't think of Gorilla Tango Theatre as the place to see riveting drama. I do not say this as a bad thing, but it is often the venue to see sketch and improv shows by individual producers rather than a place for a theatre company to present a run. *The Sweet Stuff* has drastically changed my perception of what can be accomplished in the space and the type of show that can be performed. It is a gritty drama with social relevance that boasts a fantastic script and some strong performances.



The play opens with Jerry (Colin R. Wasmund) and Walter (Carl Lindberg) sitting in a hospital waiting room. Jerry, a blue-collar construction framer, has just lost his wife while Walter, a wealthy investment banker, is awaiting to see if his hemophiliac son will recover from an injury. It turns out that Jerry is actually a man who has changed his identity because his blood has unique healing properties that could save Walter's son. The resident doctor, Dr. Sirsi (Ashlee Edgemon), who walks with wrist crutches, tries to convince Jerry of his importance to medical science. Jerry reveals

that this blood has ruined his life because everyone always wants a piece of him because he is 1 in 7 billion, while he just wants to live in peace with his daughter. Once Walter discovers Jerry's unique blood type, he goes to drastic lengths to attain a supply. I do not want to give anything away, but the stakes are raised to a considerable degree and every scene seethes with tension until the heartbreaking conclusion. I was briefly introduced to the work of playwright Jayme McGhan, and he is someone to look out for in the Chicago Theatre scene. He has a knack for examining the moral fabric of our society in a gritty environment that grabs you by the throat and refuses to let go. He builds three-dimensional characters with extensive backstories while providing an engaging plotline and riveting conflict.

The acting in this production is a bit hit and miss, but the performance of Colin R. Wasmund as Jerry ranks among the best performances I have seen this year. He performs with such honest realism and fierce intensity that I would not be surprised to see him gracing larger stages across the city in the years to come. Carl Lindberg as Walter is also strong and convincing, doing a particularly good job with hiding the truth beneath his cool exterior. The scenes between Mr. Lindberg and Mr. Wasmund set the stage on fire. Ashlee Edgemon is enjoyable as the sweet-natured bartender, Louise, offering a compassionate girl-next-door friend to Jerry. However, I felt as though her performance as Dr. Sirsi could have used more vocal variety and nuance to clarify the motivations of the character. With intense dialogue it can be a trap to shout, and sometimes the actors do fall into this trap. Jessica Snyder as Barbara, Walter's ex-wife, makes the most of her scenes even though the character seems a bit underwritten. Regardless, this is a very enjoyable ensemble.



Director Emily Cherry has utilized the Gorilla Tango space well, and is not afraid of simply having people talk back and forth for ten minutes. My only concern was the choice of transition music at points, especially the end of the first act. The fact that the design team was able to create some atmospheric lighting schemes in the Gorilla Tango space is neat as well. The set design of Peter Schmidt is simple, yet effective, which is important for a traveling show (it performed in Grand Forks and Minneapolis prior to Chicago).

While the production is not perfect, the reasons to see it far outweigh any flaws. It is one of the best written world premieres of the year with one the best performances so far this year, so to miss out on this brief run would be foolish. Young artists wishing to put their work on at Gorilla Tango should definitely take a look because it is one of the first shows I have seen to take true advantage of the space. This production rivals those of well-established non-equity storefronts and makes me very excited for the future of Chased by an Elephant and playwright Jayme McGhan. Keep an eye out for them.

Recommended

Jake Lindquist

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For full show information, check out the [The Sweet Stuff](#) page at TheatreInChicago.

At Gorilla Tango Theatre, 1919 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. Tickets \$20. call 773-598-4549 or visit www.gorillatango.com. Thursdays & Fridays at 7:30 PM, Saturdays at 6:00 PM, Sunday July 25 at 2:00 PM & Sunday August 1 at 5:00 PM. Running time is approximately 1 Hour and 50 minutes with one 15 minute intermission. Through August 1, 2010.