

Anna Wostenberg

ENG 363

Dr. Sullivan

November 3, 2013

First Date

First Date is a one act musical that explores all the awkwardness that a first blind date can have. Starring Zachary Levi and Krysta Rodriguez, this musical left the audience in stitches. Exploring all the things that can go wrong from different religious views, to not being completely over a controlling ex, to making up imaginary children, *First Date* has all the bases covered. While overall a lighthearted and funny play, *First Date* also explores some more serious topics, like holding onto past relationships and the fear of falling in love. There is a great balance between funny and serious in the show. All of the musical numbers, except for one, are funny and witty, leading the audience to leave the show feeling happy.

Throughout the whole date, the audience gets to feel all the same things that the characters are feeling: discomfort, awkwardness, fear, hesitation, and frustration. The whole play is relatable for anyone who has experienced an awkward blind date or first date. This concept is what makes the play funny; we all feel like we have been in similar positions as the characters. Being able to relate to the characters puts the audience at ease and pokes fun at something that brings each member of the audience out of their comfort zone.

An effective technique in the play is introducing an imaginary relative in the minds of the characters. We all seem to have experienced family members talking to us

in our minds when we learn some fact about a potential partner. We can just imagine what they'd say when they learn that fact. The musical number that occurs in Aaron's, Zachary Levi's character, head about Rodriguez not being Jewish as he is, was one of my favorites. Seeing his little old grandmother disappointed but standing on top of a table singing about Judaism leaves the audience laughing.

The stage direction greatly adds to the effectiveness of the music and dialogue. The director excellently grasped exactly how to direct this play to achieve maximum comedic effect. By choreographing moments like lifting the small Jewish grandmother on a chair like in a typical Jewish celebration, the director emphasized and poked fun at a common relationship issue: differing religions between the partners.

The supporting characters added to the comic relief of the play, too. The girl's best friend repeatedly calling as her "bail out" and interrupting the date at inopportune moments gave the play depth and kept it moving forward. Also, when the best friend, Reggie, freaks out, assuming that the date was a disaster and that Casey, Krysta Rodriguez's character, must have been kidnapped and murdered left me in hysterics. The waiter in the restaurant also kept the audience laughing as he meddled with the date, encouraging the couple to dance when they were in the middle of an argument. It was wonderful when Reggie and waiter met in the ending scenes because it just added to the hilarity of the show. It was a small plot twist that I'm sure much of the audience did not expect but it seemed so perfect and fitting.

The quick costume changes by these supporting characters were fun to watch as well. The four supporting actors took on many characters including other restaurant customers, Casey's pushy sister, Casey's ex boyfriends, her priest/father, Aaron's

womanizing best friend, his manipulative ex girlfriend, and Aaron's Jewish grandmother. I found myself really interested in watching them switch character in mere seconds and then resume their positions as restaurant customers as if nothing had happened.

After having a talk back with the actors, I enjoyed learning how they would tell each other stories and make up stories about their characters while they sat at the tables and that they sometimes would forget which number was coming next. They seemed to really have fun with each other and love what they were doing. I also found it interesting that most of them did not actually know the titles of the songs they performed in the show. Levi admitted to referring to one of his songs as "The Dead Mom Song" because that is the subject of the song.

The acting by Zachary Levi was excellent. Complete with voice cracks and stuttering, Levi portrays the awkward uncomfortable guy perfectly. Plagued by the fantasy version of his ex girlfriend, Alison, taking over his thoughts, Levi's character, Aaron, must overcome this hurdle before he can truly begin to fall for another woman. His best friend who is much more successful in the love department, also in his mind, gives him advice throughout the play on how to forget Alison. His cameos in Aaron's head and the advice offered with it are relatable to the audience. It seems that everyone has a friend there to offer advice, but not exactly the right advice one needs. His character develops once he forces himself to confront who his ex really was - manipulative and mean - and can finally let her go. This only happens, however, with the help of Krysta Rodriguez's character, Casey, who encourages him to say all the things he'd ever wanted to say to Alison, allowing him to finally move on from her.

Also plagued by cameos in her mind is Casey. Her older, married sister calls her out on her fear of relationships and pushes her to step outside her comfort zone to give this date a chance. Her character development during this particular date is real. A girl attracted to the bad boys is afraid to give a good guy a chance. But once she drops all her defense mechanisms, like making up a fake child and baiting Aaron into verbal traps, she realizes that this one person may be able to make her happy in life if she was only willing to give him a chance.

The resolution of the play left the audience with a feeling of contentment and that all was resolved; a classic happy ending. If there was one part of the play that I liked the least, I would have to say it was the ending. It ended with a kiss between Aaron and Casey, which was predictable. I almost think it would have left a bigger impression on the audience if the play had ended just before the kiss, leaving it a bit more open ended. After all, many first dates do not end in a kiss. But aside from this personal opinion, the whole show was wonderful. It left the audience laughing and, I'm sure, drawing many parallels to their own lives. It was a wonderful show to see and left a feeling of rightness in the world.