

BACKSTAGE WEST

Mustang Sally

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By Jennie Webb

I suppose playwright Linda Felton Steinbaum gets credit for addressing her subject matter head on. Her new play doesn't shy away from the stuff headlines are made of, even if the story is a bit like yesterday's news: a female teacher having an affair with a young student. Unfortunately, despite a skilled, committed cast, the very straightforward drama offers no real eye-openers, and the chance to inject new life into potentially provocative, controversial material is never quite realized.

It takes only moments after *Mustang Sally* opens to get the full scoop on the problem at hand. Kathy (Sally Conway), a girlish 31-year-old music teacher, is not only "very close" to one of her students, a 13-year-old boy, but their intimate relationship is the culmination of her life's dreams. Sister Elizabeth (Andrea Conte) comes over between dance classes -- she's a teacher, as well -- to troubleshoot. Not that the emotionally retarded Kathy thinks there is much of a problem: "We're a couple! We're in love!" Good thing Elizabeth thought to invite over a kind and generous lawyer pal (Michael Blain-Rozgay) to make Kathy see this is a serious matter. Meanwhile, Kathy gets emotional support from her school's art teacher (Sean Vincent Biggins) and in perverse way from her wacky, Bible-thumping mother (Tish Smiley).

Set in Kathy's apartment, the entire play takes place over 24 hours. Arturo Castillo directs, and the admirable actors embrace their roles. Playwright Steinbaum touches upon what should be the heart of *Mustang Sally*: the double standards between men and women, and the damage that happens when fantasy and life collide. However, we don't get enough that we're able to connect with the characters or their individual issues, and in the end the evening has a rather packaged, familiar feel to it.

Presented by Bryan Rasmussen in association with Artists Unlimited at the Whitefire Theatre,