

Ask Not for Whom The Mustang Rolls

Reviewed by Cynthia Citron



“Mustang Sally” was a popular rhythm and blues song in the 1960s. What that has to do with Linda Felton Steinbaum’s new play, “Mustang Sally”, is a connection I haven’t figured out yet. Unless it refers to the car that 31-year old music teacher Kathy has sex with her 13-year old student in the back seat of.

When Steinbaum’s play opens, Kathy’s affair has been exposed, she has been fired, and she is awaiting whatever consequences are to come. As portrayed by Sally Conway, Kathy is a rather ditzzy, childlike twit who doesn’t really understand what all the fuss is about, nor the trouble she is in. After all, she and the boy, Sal, are “in love”.

Enter Kathy’s sophisticated sister Elizabeth (Andrea Conte), the competent, slightly chilly owner of a dance studio, and her lawyer friend Edward (Michael Blain-Rozgay). They are there to help, despite the fact that Kathy doesn’t seem to think she needs any help.

Also there to help is the girls’ overbearing Jesus freak of a mother, played with admirable twitchiness by Tish Smiley. She parades in and out in a series of bizarre costumes (courtesy of designer Tina Rose), befitting a totally self-absorbed model-thin woman whose ego sucks all the air out of any room she enters.

And finally, there is Tony, the art teacher, (Sean Vincent Biggins), who appears to be Kathy’s only friend, but who actually has a serious agenda of his own.

As directed by Arturo Castillo, the cast does a creditable job. They are a fine ensemble. The problem is with the writing.

Steinbaum has taken a significant contemporary story, one rooted in current events, and made of it an implausible drama. A 13-year old boy just seems too young to attract a woman 18 years his senior, no matter how “old he is for his age.” And the punishment meted out to his lover, who has actually committed a serious crime, is a mild slap on the wrist that is hardly credible. And finally, the ending, so abrupt and unsatisfying, seemed to be tacked on by a playwright who apparently didn’t know where else to go. It seemed so out of context that the audience hesitated before applauding, thinking that there must be at least one more scene to wrap things up.

And despite the solemnity of the subject, a few laughs might have helped

“Mustang Sally” continues at the Whitefire Theater, 13500 Ventura Blvd. in Sherman Oaks, weekends through November 18th. Call (866) 811-4111 for tickets.

Photos: Arturo Castillo

