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## "Mustang Sally"

by Laurie Skaja



In "Mustang Sally," a new play by Linda Felton Steinbaum, we get an insider's perspective on one of society's most controversial issues - teacher/student relationships.

I know what you're thinkig - an old, creepy bald guy preying on adolescent girls in miniskirts. Gross, right? In this play however, we see what happens when the teacher is a young female who crosses the line with a thirteen-year-old boy. Steinbaum delves into the "double standard" that exists when Katherine, or Kitty, finds herself in the middle of such a scandal.

The story takes place in Katherine's apartment. Full of bright colors, the highly decorated set welcomes the viewer into this thought-provoking story, which begins with a childishly dressed Kitty watering the plants. The viewer soon discovers this shy, awkward woman is a teacher, whose scandalous relationship with her student has just been announced to the school where she taught until recently. Forced to resign her position as music instructor, Kitty now lives in her own world, oblivious to the gravity of her predicament and trying to hide the fact that she is pregnant.

Since this situation represents only a few cases of child seduction heard about today, it is difficult throughout the story to relate to the main conflict. Overtly portrayed as a

child herself, Kitty's bright pink clothes, pigtails, and framed picture of Justin Timberlake made the situation hard to grasp. It was a challenge to believe this character was a music teacher, let alone that any school would hire such an overtly immature person.

Yet Kitty did evoke a measure of sympathy in her other estranged relationships. In one heartfelt moment, the viewer becomes aware of her mother's disregard for Kitty and the religious hypocrisy that arises when she urges her to get an abortion. We also see the blatant success and superiority of her older sister, who tries repeatedly to intervene on Kitty's behalf. These issues raise questions as to why a person would commit the act of seducing a child, and Steinbaum makes it clear that these factors play a role.

This play is unique in subject matter, but also in the way the story is approached. We never see Sal, the boy who is at the other end of this affair, but instead are limited to two male figures - a lawyer, who comes to Katherine's aid at the request of her sister, and one of her fellow teachers, Tony. With a surprise twist at the end of the play, we see just how much a situation like this can affect a life when one character makes an unexpected announcement.

Steinbaum's play asks the question: "what makes it more okay for a woman to be the teacher in a case like this? The answer: a society that chooses to belittle the fact that women can be sexual predators too. A slightly disturbing play, yet a powerful one given its confrontation of rare subject matter.

Mustang Sally is playing at the Whitefire Theater in Sherman Oaks on Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and on Sundays at 2:30 p.m., until November 18. Tickets are \$20. For reservations call (866) 811-4111.

Grade: B