

THE BELLFLOWER SESSIONS

Reviewed by Dale Reynolds

9.13.12

The world premiere of American playwright **Andy Bloch** (who also writes under the name of **Rooster Mitchell**), is a fine exploration of what happens when an unstable man, taking a job he doesn't want, losing a wife he wants to keep, having therapy with a truly unhinged and voraciously sexy therapist, who's idea of good therapy is to describe her own neuroses.

As directed by **Bryan Rasmussen**, the darkly humorous play, on a gorgeous three-area set by **John Burton**, under **Derrick McDaniel's** luminous lighting design, and costumed with beautiful sense by **Paige Russell**, with a cast that is mostly exemplary, makes for a fine evening out. Starting with the ever-qualified **Rob Nagle**, supported skillfully by **Michael Monks**, **Kevin Benton** and **Stephanie Erb** (all talented), marred only by **Marshelle Fair's** lack of a theatre voice (when you can't be heard properly in a 99-seat theatre, something's wrong with your training).

In Bloch's imaginative storyline, Jack Calvin (Nagle) is having career-troubles and mixed messages from his supposedly adoring wife, Molly (Fair), who's best friend, Derek Coles (Benton) may or may not be having an affair with her. So Jack's best friend, Grant Lerner (Monks) turns him onto his ex-therapist, Dr. Bellflower (Erb), who is way too much of a firecracker to be of any use to a struggling guy. She keeps him wondering about himself and doesn't advance his mental stability.

All this is very funny in a sinister fashion. Bloch's writing shows insight into craft and character development and thus the under-two-hour playtime goes by swiftly. He has broken the two acts up into many short scenes (very cinematic is the writing) but the opening night audience kept ruining the builds by incessantly clapping after every scene, no matter how short. What? The actors won't think you like the play if you don't applaud wildly??? Relax, audiences, and let the tension and comedy build for you. Trust that these talented folk will take you where you want to go. Laugh. Gasp. Groan. Just don't applaud so much!

The Bellflower Sessions plays through October 13th, 2012, at the Whitefire Theatre, 13500 Ventura Blvd (@ Sunnyslope), Sherman Oaks, CA 91423. Tickets: 818.990.2324 or www.brownpapertickets.com.