



Eighteen

The magic number - the day of freedom - the end of childhood! There is something about the age of eighteen that promises anticipation and excitement, with its impending release from the bondage of parenthood.

Numerologists will point out that if a person adds the one to the eight the result is nine, and nine has significant symbolism among some cultures, from the occult to the mystic.

Eighteen has a special symbolism in this story by Allison Moore, where Christine, a seventeen year old girl comes to live with her aunt and uncle after the death of her mother. She has been inching away from puberty and childhood, and now suddenly comes crashing face to face with womanhood.

On the surface, the story revolves around a happily married childless couple, who agrees to have Christine move in until she finishes high school and goes off to college. They seem well adjusted, with healthy salaries, a healthy sex life and a healthy appetite, since the wife is an expert gourmet cook. When Christine joins them, the unspoken angst of having another woman in the house gnaws away at Marie, who begins to notice husband Dan's interactions with Christine. There's never a hint of impropriety, but the subtext is boiling with the turmoil of insecurity, uncertainty and eventual jealousy.

Food is a major player in the story, as Marie's exotic gourmet dishes are meant to redirect Dan's attention from Christine. When Marie describes the ingredients of a special meal, the feeling evoked by the tone of her words and the deliberate pronunciation bristles with eroticism and sexuality, to the point that the characters almost moan with pleasure at the sound of her words.

However, Christine has other issues which she tries to unravel by prowling the dark house in the middle of the night, rubbing ice cubes and ice water on her body to soothe her raging hormones, often fanned by the sounds of the couple making love in the bedroom.

Director Jay Dysart has a genuine feel for dialogue allowing the characters' conversations to flow in a natural rhythm. The use of moving tapestry panels to form little niches that become various rooms gives the actors a solid platform to work. Imaginative lighting and shadows help to accentuate the characters' conflict, with metaphoric sound designs of running water, ice crackling and tiny bells adding to the scene changes and moods.

One scene that's tucked away in the midst of the character's turmoil could evolve as the unexpected pivot of a secondary plot. Marie wants to open a restaurant, since she is an expert cook, but Dan convinces her that the time is not right, that his business is taking off, and that it would not be a good idea. She relents, and agrees to forget the idea, but you have to wonder what long lasting effects this can have. In an era where women complain that they are often repressed, refused or denied personal growth and have to take a back seat to the husband's agenda, this is just one more example, plainly depicted and eloquently stated. Some questions are left hanging - how cooperative and equal is this marriage - does Marie really feel OK giving up her dream? Would they have faced the same problem if she had gone forward? Perhaps that's grist for a different play.

If one word can describe the underlying feelings of the characters it would have to be *sexuality*. From Christine's erupting desires, to Marie's growing uncertainty about her husband, to Dan's repressed feelings, the play is like an orgasm waiting to erupt, probing for just the right touch to release the flood of emotions . . . and we are not disappointed. The final scene releases every pent up anxiety with some unexpected turns. While some questions are answered several more arise unresolved, much the same as in real life.

Rob Nagle and Jennifer Bledsoe are terrific as the couple in conflict, creating exciting chemistry between them, making both positive and negative connections that seem real and believable. Melanie Hawkins looks like she stepped out of the library at Hometown High, with the perfect look of a frail and agonized teen, making Christine seem both like victim and predator as she unwittingly disrupts the easy routine of the couple.

Eighteen is not about earth shattering events. Rather, it focuses on micro situations that seemingly affect only a few, allowing the audience to expand the concepts to situations that reflect the universal quandary of the majority of people getting by from day to day.

Comments? Write to us at: Letters@reviewplays.com

Eighteen plays at:

The Complex - The Dorie Theatre
6476 Santa Monica Blvd
Los Angeles, CA

RESERVATIONS: (323) 782-6218

December 2004