


'Unemployed Elephants' in Burbank: Road trip rom-com is good for some laughs

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By F. Kathleen Foley



Marshall McCabe and Brea Bee in "Unemployed Elephants" at Little Victory Theatre. (Tim Sullens)

Myanmar might seem an odd locale for comedy, yet it proves the ideal setting for Wendy Graf's lighthearted romance "Unemployed Elephants" at the Little Victory Theatre.

The play centers on the unlikely, frequently wacky interactions between her two protagonists, played by Brea Bee and Marshall McCabe, who remain nameless for most of the play.

She is a recently jilted bride-to-be who wants to disconnect from her humiliation and go completely off the grid. He is supposedly a producer for "Animal Planet" researching a segment on Myanmar's "unemployed elephants," pachyderms left without jobs or purpose after the teak trade tanks. He is however flying under false colors, and his constantly shifting stories are as bemusing to Jane as they are amusing to the audience.

Graf's play is essentially an extended conversation between two offbeat characters who meet by chance and find romance. It's a tour-de-force of rat-a-tat dialogue, interjected with plenty of arcane facts about a fabulously exotic locale, which, thanks largely to Nick Santiago's outstanding projection design, we experience in all its squalor and splendor.

Director Maria Gobetti and her comically gifted actors channel a monsoon of chatter into an economical staging that remains bracingly believable, when it could have so easily spilled over into stereotype.

The play is set in 2015, predating the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar in which hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims fled ethnic cleansing. That dawning crisis is referred to in the play, obliquely and belatedly.

Graf, whose works to date ("American Girl," "Please Don't Ask About Becket") have dealt with serious issues of terrorism and family pathology, displays a surprisingly nimble knack for comedy. And while "Elephants" is hardly the stuff of deathless drama, it's certainly serviceable entertainment that's good for plenty of smiles and a few good laughs on the road to Mandalay.



'Unemployed Elephants'

Where: The Little Victory Theatre, 3324 W. Victory Blvd., Burbank

When: 8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays, 4 p.m. Sundays; extended to April 29

Tickets: \$24-\$34

Info: (818) 841-5422, www.thevictorytheatrecenter.org

Running time: 1 hour, 30 minutes