



ALL-STAR 'GAY MARRIAGE PLAYS': (left to right) Harriet Harris, Beth Leavel, Mark Consuelos, Craig Bierko, Polly Draper, & Richard Thomas in *Standing on Ceremony: The Gay Marriage Plays*.

Photo: Joan Marcus



Theater Review

***Standing on Ceremony* one of best depictions of gays & lesbians ever written for the stage**

STANDING ON CEREMONY: THE GAY MARRIAGE PLAYS

Written by Mo Gaffney, Jordan Harrison, Moisés Kaufman, Neil LaBute, Wendy MacLeod, Jose Rivera, Paul Rudnick, & Doug Wright

Directed by Stuart Ross

Through December 18, 2011

Minnetta Lane Theatre

18 Minnetta Lane

(212-279-4200), <http://www.standingonceremony.net>

By David NouNou

Dear readers, whether you are gay or straight, it doesn't matter; I strongly urge you to immediately go and buy/order your tickets after you finish reading this review. *Standing on Ceremony: The Gay Marriage Plays* is phenomenal. As a rule, I am not a fan of vignette plays due to their hit-or-miss nature. Invariably there are always one or two vignettes that are misses and I slump in my seat in agony. However, I am thrilled to report that every vignette in *Standing on Ceremony* is a gem, and as directed by Stuart Ross, each scene is expertly paced and placed to leave you wanting more.

The show is done as readers' theater, but you have likely never seen the genre presented this beautifully. With an all-star cast consisting of Craig Bierko, Mark Consuelos, Polly Draper, Harriet Harris, Beth Leavel and Richard Thomas, all of whom are sensational, whether they are standing behind a podium or seated, they are not just reading lines; they are giving genuine, heartfelt performances. They extract every emotion and nuance that has been written by the playwrights. In addition, not one of the plays is at all heavy-handed or contrived, as is often the case with many gay plays. They all ring with truth, and many feature crisp dialogue loaded with quick-witted humor and insight.

Most scenes are hilarious, some are touching, some are farcical, some appear as fluff, but all are imbued with humanity and are deeply moving. What a refreshing relief not to see gays (male or female) portrayed as stereotypes—or, thanks to TV networks such as Logo, as vapid, sex-crazed airheads—but to

see them depicted as sane, caring people, with simple lives and everyday problems. This does not mean they are boring; they are people we have come to care for within a matter of minutes. Normally in vignette plays, I fidget in my seat, but in *Standing on Ceremony*, I just wanted each scene to continue and learn more about these people.

Yes, they are all superbly written and it is not fair to single any one of them out. However, I have to mention Moisés Kaufman's seamless "London Mosquitoes," a monologue delivered by Richard Thomas, giving a eulogy about his life partner of 46 years. It is out of this world, absolutely breathtaking, and do not be surprised if you shed a tear. Paul Rudnick is at his zany best with two playlets that seem to have been written for Harriet Harris' over-the-top, madcap performance: "The Gay Agenda," about a homophobic housewife dealing with the new gay couple in the neighborhood"; and "My Husband," about a liberal, Jewish NYU professor intent on playing matchmaker for her single gay son (Mark Consuelos). Fans familiar with Ms. Harris' stage and TV work know that few actors can deliver a wacky *bon mot* like she can.

Beth Leavel and Polly Draper have two delicious scenes together entitled "This Flight Tonight" by Wendy MacLeod, and "Traditional Wedding" by Mo Gaffney. Both vignettes are about lesbian couples. In the first, two women are about to board a flight from Los Angeles to Des Moines to get married. In the second, a couple reminisces about their wedding.

Doug Wright's "On Facebook," performed by the company, is an hysterical howl, about people airing out their beliefs (pro and con) on a Facebook thread about gay marriage.

Neil LaBute is not known for his warm and fuzzy nature. His male characters are often brash, abrasive, and flawed. However, here in "Strange Fruit," he has written a sensitive and loving scene, chronicling a male couple from the day they met to their wedding day. Who knew? Rock on, Mr. LaBute, and as the couple, Craig Bierko and Mark Consuelos, are absolute heaven.

My fervent hope is that *Standing on Ceremony: The Gay Marriage Plays* will have a much longer run than scheduled, with hopefully the same cast. However, if they have to leave, I hope the powers-that-be will have the foresight, as in *Love, Loss, and What I Wore*, to feature a rotating cast of stage and screen notables, and keep this show running forever because it is, without question, one of the most illuminating portraits of gay and lesbian people ever written for the theater. Now that you have finished this review, go and get your tickets.

Published November 13, 2011

Reviewed at press performance on November 12, 2011

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