



'Three Viewings' proves riveting

*Audience experiences feelings along
with characters in new play*

By JULIE McHALE - TimeOut Theater Critic February 8, 2008

A series of monologues in a funeral home characterizes the structure of Jeffrey Hatcher's play, "Three Viewings," an offering by Kopper Bear Productions, presently playing at Sunset's Studio Theatre. Kopper Bear doesn't have a theater of its own, but when it does produce something, it is always worth our attention and attendance. "Three Viewings" is no exception.

Death is a reality we tend to think only happens to other people, but there it is, creeping up on all of us. It is often the subject of comedians because we tend to joke about things of which we're afraid. This play is definitely a mix of humor and pathos. Each of the three characters takes the stage and talks to us. In the process we get to know them quite well and are introduced, via their narrations, to several other characters as well.

The first character is the mortician who runs the funeral home with his aging father. He happens to have fallen in love, often an unexpected and always a slightly wacky experience. The object of his affections is a real estate agent, a regular at funerals; in fact one he tips off on occasion to give her the heads up on a house that might soon be for sale. In the process of her frequent visits, he has been smitten to distraction, but he hesitates to tell her for fear of rejection. His stream of consciousness is a never-ending string of unspoken I love you's. His pain reaches immense proportions when an unexpected occurrence throws him off kilter further. Brian Faracy creates a high level of angst. We agonize with him.

The second character is a sexy young lady who supports herself by stealing jewelry off corpses. She explains in great detail her clever and very successful maneuvers, and when her rich grandmother dies and she returns home to pay her respects, she has a very definite plan to recover a dinner ring she had been promised as a child as a bribe for getting her first haircut. Many surprises await her and us as she strategizes her next hit.

Amy Geyser can switch from one emotion to another swiftly, and we are fascinated and moved by her cathartic journey.

The third story involves a widow named Virginia who discovers shortly after her husband's sudden death that he was deeply in debt and she had unwittingly signed papers that now put her in jeopardy of losing everything. Elaine Wyler creates such a fascinating, slightly ditzy, totally lovable character here that we are almost moved to tears when hearing her story. Watching her as she sits sedately on a formal couch amidst the bouquets relating this dismal tale is the ultimate irony.

Part of the humor of this piece comes from the setting. We are at a "viewing," a euphemistic word for looking at a corpse, but we are really viewing the souls of the living, and our perspective changes. It's life, not death, that's scary.

Well directed by Howard Bashinski, this riveting play deserves an audience. It runs two more weekends. Call (262) 782-4430 for reservations.