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# Daniel's Husband & Life's Perversity

Sylvie · Wednesday, May 22nd, 2019

Sometimes…it does feel as if life is simply out to get us. You make a choice you believe is right, you fight for it with everything you've got, or think you've got. And then that thing you thought was a simple choice comes back to haunt you.

Mitchell and Daniel have been partners for seven blissful years. One writes, the other designs. They live in a lovely home (the work of scenic artist DeAnne Mallais). They're comfortable, happy together, as well as enjoyed and admired by their friends.

Daniel is a successful architect, with pretty good personal taste to go with it. Daniel's widowed mother Lydia is not only accepting of her son's sexual preference, but also happy about it. She's also crazy about his partner, Mitchell, who derisively calls himself the Barbara Cartland of gay writers, but let's face it: he's a published novelist, with his latest book in galley proof and, as his agent Barry reminds him, a contract for three more.

What could possibly go wrong?

l-r, Bill Brochtrup & Tim Cummings in *Daniel's Husband* at Hollywood's Fountain Theatre.

In The Fountain Theatre production of Michael McKeever's play *Daniel's Husband*, it's that eternal question that hangs over us all like the sword of Damocles. The two men have just one disagreement between them: Daniel would like to get married, but Mitchell doesn't believe in marriage, insisting marriage is an outdated custom that originated strictly as a system for the division of wealth. Hmmm. You'd think that shouldn't be much of an issue. He and Daniel are crazy about each other; nothing is going to change that. Shouldn't that be the only thing that matters?

Of course, life finds a way to abruptly end this discussion, and it does so with a calamitous crisis that no one could have imagined. While the play so far has been full of clever drawing-room pleasantries—in a kind of neatly turned out derivation of the well-made-play—playwright McKeever hammers it with a situation that tosses all arguments out the window, leaving no one to blame for the sudden state of affairs, unless you account for providence.

The play's second half (wisely, there is no intermission) is where all of the people we've met so far must come to terms with the lousy hand they've just been dealt. It's also where McKeever's writing skills become a lot more interesting. *Daniel's Husband* has its sit-com moments, but the

production it receives at The Fountain is as close to perfect as one might envision. It is wrenching, it is real, it is flawlessly staged by Simon Levy, The Fountain's Producing Director, and it is stirringly performed by a handpicked cast of pros.

So complete is the integration of the performances that singling out any one of these actors seems unfair to the others. They are exactly who they're meant to be. Bill Brochtrup is the blond, good-looking Daniel, smart, elegant, impossible to not like, while Tim Cummings delivers the intellectually darker Mitchell, the depth of whose emotional pain, as events progress, is all but scorching to the eyes and ears.

Anyone lucky enough to have seen Cummings in the Rogue Machine production of Enda Walsh's *The New Electric Ballroom* or The Fountain's edition of Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* cannot doubt the importance of his talent. But Cummings is not alone in this achievement. Levy's production is a prototype of what real ensemble work should be and very much up to The Fountain's highest standards.

Jenny O'Hara's performance as Daniel's mother Lydia, giddy with love for her only son, who secretly dislikes her because he believes that she was deeply unfair to his father, is a marvel of logic and likability, even when things turn cloudy and she's faced with making painfully difficult choices.

l-r, Ed F.Martin, Jenny O'Hara & Tim Cummings in *Daniel's Husband* at The Fountain Theatre.

Ed F. Martin, as Mitchell's agent, Barry, a good friend to both Mitchell and Daniel, comes across not just as an aging gay man with a roving eye for ever younger lovers, but as a person capable of sincerity, deeply disturbed by the turn of events. He also is responsible for introducing us to the play's most enchanting character, the youthful, wise and well-named Trip, an effusive caregiver, played with boundless *joie de vivre* by a very playful José Fernando.

Giving nothing away, I would defy any other production—except perhaps The Fountain's *Cost of Living* by Martyna Majok, presented last November—to be quite as heartbreaking. This is not said lightly. It would be easy for *Daniel's Husband* to slip into melodrama. Yet it does not. Everything about this staging is measured, even its most tragic aspects.

l-r. Bill Brochtrup, José Fernando & Ed F.Martin (seated) in *Daniel's Husband* at The Fountain Theatre.

Lydia is on target when she states without a shred of self-pity, "there are no villains here." It is the kind of balancing act that saves the play from itself.

*Top image: l-r, Tim Cummings, Bill Brochtrup & Jenny O'Hara in* Daniel's Husband *at The Fountain theatre.*

*Photos by Ed Krieger*

**WHAT: *Daniel's Husband***

**WHERE:** The Fountain Theatre, 5060 Fountain Ave.Los Angeles, CA 90029.

**WHEN:** Fridays, 8pm; Saturdays, 2 & 8pm; Sundays, 2pm; Mondays, 8pm. Ends June 23.

**HOW:** Tickets $25-$45, online at www.FountainTheatre.comor by phone at 323.663.1525. Seniors 65 or older, $35; Students w/ID: $25; Mondays, $40 &/or Pay-What-You-Want (subject to availability).

**PARKING:** Street or secure, on-site lot, subject to availability, $5.

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