

Sylvia

A milkbone treat for all

By Mitch Teich

At a recent performance of *Sylvia*, the latest offering by the Theatrikos Theater Company, I overheard one audience member hypothesize that "you really need to be a dog lover to appreciate this play." Not true. My sole connection to the canine world comes from walking my mother-in-law's beagle, stepping on the tail of my grandparents' schnauzer, and watching the Westminster Kennel Club dog show every year when it comes on TV. And I thought *Sylvia* was a dog worth walking.

Examining the true meaning of our relationship with dogs is an easy concept to grasp because—many of us, at least—have no trouble imagining a conversation with a dog. And true to our expectations, *Sylvia*—the humanized dog of A.R. Gurney's comedy—is an animal whose psyche is riddled with thoughts about food, play, and affection for her master.

Sylvia (Lindsay Caron) is an excitable Poodle/Labrador mix taken in by apartment-dweller Greg (Rob Waltz). His adoption of *Sylvia* comes much to the

chagrin of Greg's wife, Kate (Irish Noonan) who—now that the nest is empty—was looking forward to spending some quality years alone with her husband.

While some of *Sylvia's* affections for Greg take on a more-feline-than-canine quality, Caron brilliantly captures what Dave Barry once called the "unrestrained dance of lunatic dog joy." There are scenes during which we quickly lose track of what Greg and Kate are saying, as our attention wanders to how *Sylvia* is entertaining herself.

Greg quickly bonds with *Sylvia* over the objections of his wife. And it's in the scenes in which his attentions wander away from Kate and to the woman... er, dog... in his life, that Waltz's slightly bewildered manner is at its best. Like many a mid-life-crisis-aged man, his intentions aren't necessarily bad, but neither is the message he's subconsciously sending.

There are times in which we'd expect Noonan's Kate to react with more intensity. She, too, is often mystified at the events taking place around her—at one point saying she could handle it if Greg was

actually having an affair with a woman. It's his bond with *Sylvia* that she doesn't get.

The play is also peppered with three entertainingly over-the-top performances by Eric Lenhart. Lenhart manages to play a testosterone-laden-but-philosophical dog owner named Tom, an old friend of Kate's named Phyllis (who also doesn't get Greg's connection to his dog), and a sexually-ambiguous marriage counselor named Leslie.

The play's generally happy ending is not unexpected—it's *Sylvia*-meets-*When Harry Met Sally* epilogue is probably unnecessary.

Sylvia is probably not a great play to bring young children to, unless you care to add birds and bees to the animals you'll discuss on the ride home. And *Sylvia* sprinkles her conversation with the kind of colorful (and sometimes harsh) epithets you'd imagine a dog from New York City would verbalize.

In all, though, there's enough good humor and enough genuinely engaging performances to make *Sylvia* a treat for all—a milkbone for all, except maybe the most fanatical cat lovers.

Sylvia runs through March 17 at the Theatrikos Theater Company's Flagstaff Playhouse, 11 West Cherry Ave. Performances are March 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, and 17 at 8:00 p.m., with 2 p.m. matinees on March 3 and 10. **TV**

REVIEW

