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What We've Seen

Lulu Fabulous Playbill Café

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By Deryl Davis

Local playwright Callie Kimball has an ear for the quick jibe and a sure eye for the hilarious send-up. In *Lulu Fabulous*, premiering at the Playbill Café, she offers us two rollicking years in the life of Lulu, a single, nearly thirty-something Washingtonienne in search of love/sex, connection, and proof that life isn't one big accident. As appealingly played by Mary C. Davis, Lulu is spunky, charming, and so open you'd swear you'd known her for years. Full of witty dialogue, zany characters, and many laugh-out-loud scenes, *Lulu* is a trip through a girl's life that has relevance for anyone who's ever questioned whether they'll find the right mate or the right job or tie up all those loose ends in existence. (You won't).

Much of *Lulu Fabulous* centers on *Laugh-In* style vignettes, in which characters pop in and out of brief scenes (even stage windows) depicting aspects of Lulu's life. Certainly, the most memorable of these are the speed dating scenes, in which Lulu recalls her futile attempts to find a romantic partner (a succession of increasingly goofy suitors parades in, exchanges greetings, and moves on to the sound of a game show bell); and the interactions between Tex and Rex, Lulu's karate-chopping pet fish (Alex Perez and Patrick Bussink), who move about the stage casting juvenile insults at one another (in over-the-top Asian accents) and lusting after their mistress. While much in the play is a send-up of single-girl-in-the-city stereotypes, it moves toward more serious themes when Lulu goes to Maine to see her dying grandmother. There, the dysfunctional family dynamics Lulu has spoken of (absent men, accidental children, and women



Mary C. Davis with Alex Perez (left) and Patrick Bussink

Chris McKenzie/Phoenix Theatre DC

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who resent both) are straightened out a bit. Not that anything is entirely straightened out in Lulu's story; it's just offered to us honestly and with enough satire and self-effacement (thanks to engaging work from Davis) that we remain in complete sympathy with the perky protagonist.

It's Lulu's attempts to get out of her "lumbar twist" of a life that hold our attention: the dating episodes, a comic scene at a zen yoga retreat, the multitude of romantic and personal "false starts" along a way that does, eventually, lead back to Washington. Davis is amply supported in that journey by a strong supporting cast, including Rose McConnell as friend Amy, and Shelby Sours and the aforementioned Perez and Bussink in a variety of small, comic roles. Under the direction of Phoenix Theatre Artistic Director Bridget O'Leary, *Lulu* moves fast and glides effortlessly from light drama to surreal comedy (those crazy talking fish!), leaving the audience just time to catch its breath between modes. O'Leary's pale pink set with matching cut-out windows nicely evokes Lulu's self-described "sitcom" life and the *Laugh-In* style presentation of her recollections.

In the end, Lulu makes a decision designed to free her from the sort of "accidental" lives of her maternal forebears. She won't just passively allow things to determine who she is. But, as Elvis Costello once reminded us, accidents of all kinds can happen. That Lulu has come among us must surely be a happy one.