



# BWW Review: FOREVER HOUSE - A Most Entertaining, Mind-Opening Place to Spend Your Time

by

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**FOREVER HOUSE** by [Tony Abatemarco](#)/ directed by [Elizabeth Swain](#)/Skylight Theatre/thru February 28, 2016

This Skylight Theatre Company's production of playwright [Tony Abatemarco](#)'s world premiere of **FOREVER HOUSE** will be the play I compare/measure all other plays I see this year -- and this is only January! Abatemarco's witty repartee comes out of the mouths of such three-dimensional characters as Jack, one of the main characters, and his acerbic mother Evelyn. As the only son of a single mother, Jack has taken on so many more qualities of his mom than he likes to admit; for example, her wit and razor-sharp verbal daggers always landing on their intended targets (whether they actually hear it or not). [Elizabeth Swain](#) deftly directs her talented cast with never a lag or dull moment; with only time enough for the audience to laugh or shed a tear. The stellar cast consists of [Michael Rubenstone](#) as Jack, [James Liebman](#) as his lover Ben, Dale Raoul as Jack's mother Evelyn, [Elyse Mirto](#) in the dual roles of the nosy head of homeowners Gloria and the evangelist neighbor Francine, and [Joel Swetow](#) in his dual roles as realtor Bill and Francine's husband Pete.

**FOREVER HOUSE** begins with a comic series of well-timed entrances and exits of Jack and Ben as they keep passing/missing each other in their new house's foyer/living room they just moved into. (Kudos to [John Iacovelli](#)'s realistic in-the-process of being refurbished Craftsman House set.) Jack's giving an audio tour of his new home to his mom on the phone while Ben's hurrying from room to room putting initial touches to their remodeling. Rubenstone's Jack, the ideal glass-is-half-empty kvetcher. Rubenstone handles Jack's snappy barbs and cynicism quite effortlessly. Liebman's Ben, the perfect yin to Jack's yang. The calm to his hysteria. The optimism to Jack's pragmatism. Liebman's Ben would be the perfect partner for anyone, gay or straight. Ben's loving, caring, understanding, and empathizing. He's also a good cook, *and* handy with tools.

After four years together, Jack and Ben have bought their first home in a suburb outside of Los Angeles. Day One moving-in jitters include meeting a homophobic homeowner Gloria (Mirto as the impeccably hateful, controlling neighborhood rebel-rouser) and the strange rattling and spooky ghost voices coming from the basement only Jack can hear. Arriving to check on his new homeowners, Swetow steals the scene and commands the stage as his Bill the realtor gets drunker and drunker with each sip from his celebratory flask neither of the guys are touching. (Very fun recreations of cable TV realtor ads (by Nicholas Santiago) starring Bill bookend the show.)

Act Two begins a year later with a major set change to Jack and Ben's newly decorated, quite over-the-top nursery in the basement. (Nice, again, Mr. Iacovelli!) Raoul's simply wonderful as Jack's overbearing mother. She critiques every detail of the nursery to her son, but in an instant complete about-face, compliments the same exact details of the said nursery to Ben. Raoul's comic timing so sharp! And her Evelyn's revelations to Ben - so telling, so touching, so real.

The characters of evangelist Francine and Pete receive full humanizations from Mirto and Swetow as non-stereotypical characteristics of themselves get revealed in a time of crisis.

Don't worry, the mysterious sounds Jack hears get sufficiently explained utilizing the Jewish folklore term "*dybbuk*."

Bravo to all for handling the very smooth transitions of Abatemarco's comic antics to serious life issues. Only Abatemarco breaks his own rule of not intermingling entertainment with somber messaging in the last few minutes of Jack's talk with his future son. (Although Santiago's amusing larger-than-life video stills of gay divas receive their expected appreciative responses.)

A must-see for all open-minded theatre lovers. Take your not-so-opened minded acquaintances for a possibly mind-widening experience. Stereotyping, or even initial first impressions, can be misleading from all ends of the sexuality and religious spectrum.

[www.skylighttheatrecompany.com](http://www.skylighttheatrecompany.com)

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