

Forever House Review - Are There Ghosts in the Basement?

By Elaine L. Mura

Now that gay couple Jack and Ben have found each other and decided to commit, the next step seems to be respectability, growing up, and all that goes with assimilating and fitting in. Buying a house just seems to be the right decision. What could possibly go wrong?

Tony Abatemarco's new play elicits both laughter and tears as he explores what it means to belong in our egalitarian society and how hard equality may actually be to achieve. The couple is gay and moves into a conservative suburb - which would certainly suggest potential fireworks. Add to that the fact that Jack is Jewish and his partner Ben is not – and the probability for problems is compounded. Enter Jack's mother Evelyn with whom Jack has had a love/hate relationship for years, and the playwright bumps it up a notch.

Maybe it wasn't such a good idea for the pair to buy the same house where Jack spent his earliest years. Almost immediately, the familiar environment triggers Jack's blocked memories; and scraps of his haunting background threaten his relationships with the key people in his life, most particularly with his partner Ben. What at first feels like a light-hearted comedy skillfully begins to take hold of the audience while probing universal issues that can make or break a relationship. You'll have to see FOREVER HOUSE to find out if Jack and Ben can weather the storm.

Powerful issues are ably intertwined as Jack (Michael Rubenstone) and Ben (James Liebman) struggle to find a balance in their relationship and in their lives. The actors are adept and on target for the depths that playwright Abatemarco examines beneath the surface of the comedy. Talented interpretations of the Jack and Ben characters are well-balanced by excellent performances from Dale Raoul who plays Jack's mother, Elyse Mirto, who shines in two very different roles, and an accomplished Joel Swetow. Through it all, the firm yet sensitive hand of director Elizabeth Swain is evident.

Tony Abatemarco's script is well written, balancing the humorous and the poignant. Perhaps a bit

redundant and over-long is Jack's second act rant about the pain of being gay, since it's doubtful that the audience would have missed his vitriolic clues from the beginning. John Iacovelli's set, Jeff McLaughlin's lighting, Peter Bayne's sound, Nicholas Santiago's video design, and Terry A. Lewis' costumes add to the overall dramatic effect of the piece. The entire production team has done a bang-up job.

FOREVER HOUSE runs through February 28, 2016, with performances at 8:30 p.m. on Fridays, 8 p.m. on Saturdays, and 3 p.m. on Sundays. The Skylight Theatre is located at 1816 ½ N. Vermont Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90027. Tickets range from \$30 to \$34. For reservations, call 213-761-7061 or go online at <http://skylighttix.com>.