

Forever House

Reviewed by Lovell Estell III

Skylight Theater Company

Through February 28

For Jack and Ben (Michael Rubenstone, James Liebman), the future could not be brighter. At a time when gay couples have attained something approaching legitimacy and equal rights, they have just purchased a stylish craftsman home in a very white bread “straight,” neighborhood, and are mulling over the details of decoration and the possibility of a family. Full assimilation and acceptance at last. Or is it?

Unfortunately, all is not what it seems. This particular house is one Jack grew up in, and he starts to experience strange things — such as a child crying in the basement — which immediately darkens the heretofore festive mood, and inexorably forces the relationship of the two lovers onto perilous ground.

Playwright Tony Abatemarco’s two-act romantic comedy is a cleverly written, yet awkward patchwork of ideas and motifs that often strains for credibility and confluence. Part thriller, part comedy, part drama, it doesn’t always fit together into a coherent whole.

Act II’s opaque psychological underpinnings, ostensibly meant to clarify, do just the opposite, and the finale sloshes away in sentimentality. Notwithstanding the bathos, there is much to enjoy about this production. Abatemarco has scripted an amusing cast of characters (Dale Raoul as Ben’s chatty Jewish mother is a hoot), and director Elizabeth Swain draws excellent performances from an ensemble that includes Joel Swetow and Elyse Mirto.

Skylight Theater Company, 1816 ½ North Vermont Ave., L.A.; Fri., 8:30 p.m.; Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m.; through February 28. (213) 761-7061 or <http://skylighttix.com> Running time: 2 hours and 10 minutes with one 15-minute intermission.