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"The Return of Toodles Von Flooz" — featuring Lisa Mamazza, Colin McFadden & Brianne Mai. (Photo by Kristin Skye Hoffmann)

Four women wrote this

13th effort by Wide Eyed Productions features best of 388

BY JERRY TALLMER

Published: Thursday, February 10, 2011 12:58 PM CST

Just call them A, B, C, D. That's what the playwright calls them — or, rather, that's what her play calls them.

When the lights go up, all four are discovered in a sterile-looking sort of waiting room/classroom. The younger of the two couples, A (male) and B (female), sit with arms around one another. Not so with the older, more uptight couple. D (male) paces the room impatiently while C (female), his wife, just sits and broods.

All four are waiting to be individually red-lighted or green-lighted as a consequence of certain computer-generated intelligence tests. A deus ex machina simply identified as "Efficient Woman" is on hand to elucidate the results.

The play is "Selection" — as in Darwin's "natural selection" — and it is the one I liked best of the four one-acts by four women presented together under the rubric "A Girl Wrote It." The playwright is Kris Montgomery of Shelton, Connecticut — whose day job, as it happens, is installing computer software.

When the results for A, B, C, and D come in, the green light flashes three times, the red light flashes once. Now what? Who gets the intelligence test's thumbs up to bring that baby into the brave new world of the

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day after tomorrow — and who does not?

The admirably concise “Selection” contains overtones not only of Aldous Huxley and Orwell, but of early and late Albee (“The Sandbox,” “The American Dream,” “The Play About the Baby”) as well as of a scary futuristic Ira Levin novel called “This Perfect Day” (1970) — right down to ID touch pads at every turn.

“This play,” says Montgomery, “has been done a number of places, starting in 1999, and then thrown away, It was rediscovered last fall by my 16-year-old daughter Erin — the youngest of my three daughters — when she was looking for a one-act play she could direct next year in school. Then I got a notice from the Dramatists Guild about this company, Wide Eyed Productions, that was looking for one-act scripts by women.”

Plays have to get conceived and brought to birth, just like human babies. This one, says its mother — whose three flesh-and-blood daughters are, as it happens, adopted — was spurred into life “by discussions I used to have with friends about whether some people ought to have to get a license to give birth to a child. Alcoholics, welfare mothers, low-IQ’s, et cetera. That’s not exactly genocide, but a gray area.”

From this play, her play, “Selection”:

EFFICIENT WOMAN: This is interesting. The computer print out says that this is one of the highest greens we’ve ever had.

A: Meaning?

EFFICIENT WOMAN: They almost passed the red [this particular green’s partner] just because the green was so high.

B: So, why don’t they do that? We want to have kids together.

EFFICIENT WOMAN: They didn’t do it because if they start making exceptions, the whole system falls apart.

A: Isn’t that what the Nazis did? You’re trying to get rid of a whole group of people.

B: This is genocide.

EFFICIENT WOMAN: No, it isn’t. No one’s being killed here. We just don’t let everyone reproduce. There’s a big difference....

All the above — indeed, all of “Selection” — represents, to Montgomery “a kind of argument with myself — and it’s my hope that it will elicit discussion and/or argument elsewhere.”

Montgomery, who says she was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, “somewhere in the last century,” and that she is “married to a woman named Lisa,” has an acting/singing career alongside playwriting. She has widely toured as the Eva Peron of “Evita,” and — in nice happenstance parallel to her present Red Room connection — plays keyboard and sings with a band called Those 4 Girls.

Which takes us to another Kris — or, to be more exact, Kristin Skye Hoffmann — the co-founder (with Liz White and Sky Seals) of Wide Eyed Productions. It is Hoffmann who had the idea of putting four short plays together under the heading “A Girl Wrote It,” and is the director of one of those four, Lisa Ferber’s farcical film noir bar room Western, “The Return of Toodles Von Flooz.”

Directing is Hoffmann’s passion, starting back at the University of Northern Colorado, from where she and a number of theater-minded pals came straight to New York to try to do their thing. Wide-eyed is what they knew they were.

Her directing of an exciting 2007 “Medea” for the Hudson Shakespeare Company was rehearsed “for a really long time,” but got “only four performances — all outdoors, all free — which seemed a pity to me.”

Perhaps it could be done again, and better, and indoors. “If I do it again,” she said to her buddies, “will you guys stick with me?”

Yes, they said, yes.

After much search, she found “a very nice man named Richmond Shepard,” who made his East 26th Street theater available to her without a deposit — and a second “Medea,” again starring Amy Lee Pearsall, was on its wide-eyed way.

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"Everybody lent us stuff, and somehow we even managed to come out in the black. This is now our 13th production and our second evening of one-acts. In all 12 of those shows, we had never done anything written by a woman, and I thought that was crazy.

"We did a call for scripts by a woman, posted it all over the place. Received 388 submissions, and I read all 388." This was chopped down to 50, and then to the four at Red Room: "Clementine," by Lynda Green; "Plight of the Apothecary" by Elizabeth Birkenmeier; "The Return of Toodles Von Flooz," by Lisa Ferber; and "Selection," by Kris Montgomery.

A, B, C, D. Red light, green light. Stop and Go in The Red Room. Keep your eyes wide open.

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