

Theatre Ghost

FISHING IN THE DEPTHS: “VIRAL” AT THE BOOTLEG

JANUARY 13, 2015

When I was a kid, I loved surf fishing. My Dad and brother and I would stand on the beach and toss a line with up to a half-dozen hooks of different sizes, each with a different bait to tempt various kinds of fish. Or crabs. We'd take whatever came.

Viral, at the Bootleg Theater, reminds me a little of surf fishing. Within the first few minutes, we've hooked several lively topics — the internet, assisted suicide, porn and dysfunctional relationships among them. The script moves so well, and the characters are acted so well, that we wait eagerly to see what's coming next.



Alicia Adams, Daniel Dorr (photo: Justin Zsebe)

When all's done, *Viral* turns out not to be about the internet (despite its title), nor any of these other issues, so much as about the conflict between what's real and what we imagine. It's thus also about, yes, the big fish, the one lurking in the depths, hiding in the seaweed of metaphors: Art.

Mac Rogers' writing and Darin Anthony's directing lead us through several clever turns along the way, so I'll do no spoiling. I'll just say *Viral* makes its point forcefully. And honestly. The artists win the right to say it, but they don't; they embody it instead.

Mariel Higuera's Geena hooks us first, flickering like a small fish between hope and fear as she tries to please her lover Colin. She also gains moments of giddy control when she turns up the sexual heat. As Colin, the plot's driving force, Daniel Dorr lets us feel the fear wriggling behind his obsessive perfectionism; his neurosis drifts toward abusive, but he's never cruel or cold.

Oscar Camacho makes Jarvis, the techie, gofer and third wheel, more than a hormone-driven caricature; at times, he's the sanest person in the room, the one whose reactions we trust. And in Snow, the film distributor who got away, Mark Kinsey Stephenson creates a shady *commedia* type who morphs into a serious man of business, dropping the climactic choice squarely in everyone's lap.

But the show belongs to Meredith, the lost soul seeking closure who wanders into this den of misfits. From the first, Alicia Adams nicely blends strength and confusion, sharing her roller-coaster evolution with us. She delivers her "big speech" to Geena as revelations she suddenly sees, and confessions the crisis rips out of her; the self-knowledge she finds at the end is fully earned.

The fine performances are grounded by a well-designed, clearly lit platform set (the work of Aaron Francis), accessorized by shrewd use of visible offstage space. Sherry Linnell's costumes stay simple and mark the characters clearly. And the Bootleg space, cavernous though it is, delivers sound remarkably well.

In the first of what they hope will be several co-productions, Bootleg Theater and Moving Arts have skillfully landed a "fine kettle of fish." Their *Viral* is an intelligent, fast-moving comedy that reaches well into the depths.

Viral, by Mac Rogers, directed by Darin Anthony.

Presented by Moving Arts and Bootleg Theater, at the Bootleg, 2220 Beverly Blvd. (west of Alvarado).