Twist your way into Silverstein’s adult works

by Bridgette Redman

Those who read his children’s poetry always suspected that Shel Silverstein had a delightfully twisted mind. His works always had dark undertones in which children were eaten by cannibals and garbage stacked up to suffocate the whole world.

Turn that mind to adult topics and it makes for a late-night comedy that is darkly amusing and filled with uproarious laughter.

What can you expect from “An Adult Evening of Shel Silverstein” now playing on Fridays and Saturdays at Michigan State University’s Summer Circle theater? You can expect bag ladies, rhyming whores, dead ponies and a threatening Laundromat owner. These are just some of the characters that show up in this seven-sketch play, performed by an ensemble of four actors.

The next skit is cleverly done and all four actors show how much can be done with just a few words. “Thinking up a New Name for the Act” has four scenes and in all of them, the only thing the actors ever say is “meat and potatoes.”

“Buy One Get One Free” is the skill that reinforces that this is a play for mature audiences only. While there was strong language in earlier skits, this scene features two hookers who are selling themselves with a song that sounds suspiciously like Barney’s “I love you.” They sing of what they’ll do for their customers and all of it rhymes with their names: Merrilee and Sherrilee. Bonner and Gronlund play the hookers and Sheynerman and Hinkley come along as potential customers, making their counteroffer in rap.

Throughout the 70-minute show, the ensemble moves quickly into place and twirls around Hernando Claros set piece that opens and closes to reveal different scenes and turns around to create a bedroom. It’s effective and keeps things moving, though the one side didn’t want to stay closed when it was supposed to.

Costumes were designed by Chelle Peterson and “mentored” by Angie Wendelberger, and were designed for quick changes between and during sketches.

Director Paige Conway mined this script to make it more comic than dark, but she played up all the twisted aspects. There were no dead spots within the sketches and each scene had its well-defined space.

Opening night had the crowd laughing long after the show ended and they were laughs well-earned from his tightly-directed ensemble of fine comedic actors.

SHOWDETAILS:
An Adult Evening of Shel Silverstein
Summer Circle
Michigan State University, Lansing
June 12, 13, 19, 20, 26, and 27 at approximately 10:00 p.m.
Price: free
Summer Circle