

Appearances can be deceiving in provocative 'Fat Pig'

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The Monterey Peninsula College Theatre Company delivered a very successful production of Neil LaBute's examination of prejudice in his explicitly named play "Fat Pig."

The title tells it all. It strikes a note that sounds loud and clear. Fat is out. Fat is bad. Fat is ugly. Fat is socially unacceptable and, according to the media, it is all around us.

It doesn't matter how nice you are or how bright you are. Appearance is everything — or at least that is what the author is saying in a play that engages your interest and sympathy, but which is then shaped and manipulated to an inevitable and predictable conclusion.

LaBute's characters exemplify the premise of the author's particular slant on modern-day life. He has created four characters who are almost caricatures.

There is Helen, the highly intelligent, attractive and well-adjusted heavy woman who has learned to outwardly accept her size and appetite. She can joke and make fun of herself and does it before others do it for her.

Helen meets Tom in a cafeteria and there is immediate empathy between them.

Tom is a trim, good looking, rising executive type who is amazed at himself for being attracted to a

woman of less-than-fashionable proportions, but whose gentleness and warmth fills a need in him.

Since there has to be menace in the plot, LaBute conjured up Carter, an impossible to get rid of, smarmy and unlikeable nose body who has a nastily convincing grasp of the practical aspects of building a career.

He is the carrier of the message that above all else "appearance matters."

Adding to Tom's problems, there is Jeanne, the shapely but viciously tongued accountant who is on the warpath because Tom dated her and dropped her. She is a character the viewer would soon love to strangle.

Director Kirsten Clapp has put together a cohesive and strong cast who maintain believable interactions and responses.

Their pace sparkles and they make real people out of a character study of a set of not very appealing and two-dimensional people.

Jessica Voris gives Helen an appealing charm. She shows her happy appreciation of being in a fulfilling relationship.

When the author's conception of reality is forced upon her, she bravely struggles to overcome these obstacles and engages your concern.

Todd Stone as Tom does a fine job with the part of the lackluster hero. He lets his personal weakness come to the fore as he is verbally assaulted by Carter and Jeanne.

His conflicted emotional immaturity is clear in his inability to ward off their attacks and he can't find the strength to fight for his own happiness. This

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makes him the real villain of the story.

As the smoothly destructive Carter, John Carroll is a nasty troublemaker as he ostensibly tries to save Tom from his wrong-headed inattention to appearances — which would ruin his upward mobility.

He pretends concern, but savors spoiling his colleague's contentment.

Camille Marcello as Jeanne achieves an almost villainous hateful persona as she unreasonably harasses Tom about an imaginary jilting. Her flow of screaming venom is strongly unappealing, but very ably executed.

As the play runs its course, the realistic ending is apparent. One wished better things for Helen and Tom, even as one wished a pox on Carter and Jeanne. Maybe LaBute will write a sequel with a happy ending.

There are eight well-defined scenes which tell this unkind story and Kirsten Clapp's set and costume design are clever, ingenious and attractive.

Well-chosen music bridges tie the scenes together very aptly.

This play is well worth attending for its excellent presentation and the thought-provoking ideas it leaves with the audience to analyze and think about.

Nathalie Plotkin can be reached at nanoplotkin@redshift.com . GO!

THEATER REVIEW ·What: Monterey Peninsula College Theatre Company presents Neil LaBute's "Fat Pig"
 ·Where: Studio Stage, Monterey Peninsula College, 980 Fremont St., Monterey ·When: Continues at 8 p. m. Fridays and Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays

through Sept. 28 ·Tickets: \$15, young adult (16-25) \$10, available by calling 646-4213 from 3-7 p.m. Wednesday-Friday or online at www.ticketguys.com
 ·Information: 646-4213

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