

“Human Error” demonstrates the importance of seeing past differences

By Sharon K. Sobotta

In a divided nation with an often palpable tension between the reds and the blues, the conservatives and the liberals, those who identify as pro-life and pro-choice and all those in between, it's easy to otherize, ostracize or vilify those who see the world dif-

ferently than we do. In this context, the Town Hall Theatre's production of Eric Pfeffinger's "Human Error," directed by Richard Perez, couldn't be timelier. In the opening scene, an NPR-listening, pacifist interracial couple is in a distressing

conversation with their IVF doctor, who informs them that their embryos have been mistakenly implanted in another woman. He cheekily adds that if Madelyn had simply taken her husband's last name after marriage, then the mistake might not have

happened. Heather, a God-fearing, stay-at-home mother of three and her truck-owning, gun-loving husband Jim are the alleged recipients of Heather and Keenan's embryo.

As the couples grapple with their seemingly irreconcilable differences, they find tidbits of relatability and humanity in one another. While being a stay-at-home mom was once unthinkable to Madelyn and yoga seemed too pagan for Heather, the unlikely friends find themselves practicing together, finding some common ground after Heather leaves her corporate job to teach yoga full time. Meanwhile, Keenan travels down memory lane to his childhood church going days – to the dismay of his wife, Heather. If not for the misplaced embryo that brought these four people together, chances are, they would've steered clear of one another.

Amy Orear, a self described empty nester who went through many challenges in her own journey to and through motherhood, found relatability in the play on many levels. "I found the play to be provocative in a good way," Orear says. While Orear considers herself liberal, many of her friends are conservative and will likely vote differently than her in the forthcoming election. "I spent yesterday evening with those (conservative) people, who are also my people in spite of our different beliefs," Orear says. "This play exemplifies what it means to know people on the basic level and love one another and get angry with one another and be misunderstood but our common core as humans is all the same."

"I think it's a really smart play about the times that we're living in as a very divided country. I also feel like there's a lot of hope in the play," Perez says. "I hope that when folks come to check it out, they'll see a



Photo Jay Yamada

From left: Kyle Goldman (Jim), Melody Payne (Heather), John Charles Quimpo (Dr. Hoskins), Flannery Mays (Madelyn), and Mark Anthony (Keenan).

little bit of themselves in it and open their eyes a little bit to how people across the political spectrum live."

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As a woman in her thirties who is an adoptee, contemplating how or if motherhood will be in the cards for her, Flannery Mays, who plays Madelyn, learned a lot from both her character and her counterpart. "Madelyn is sarcastic, judgmental, and smart but underneath that shell, she's vulnerable and scared. She wants to connect, but she lets her judgmentalness get in the way," Mays says. "Through her friendship with Heather – a republican and a Jesus believer, who is also kind and smart in her own way – Madelyn's walls come down, go up, and come back down. I relate to that."

Mays has found the play and her journey through it to be challenging, and even triggering at times, but ultimately beautiful. "I come from an open-adoption, so playing a character who wants a biological child so badly was challenging because part of me is like, 'why are you spending all this money and going through all this pain when you could adopt a child?'"

Mays hopes that "Human Error" inspires people to lead with love and good intentions and replace judgment with patience and curiosity. "In this political climate, demonizing the other side doesn't work. I think if we can work towards humanity and understanding, things might get better," Mays says. "If you want to laugh and cry and get in touch with these deeper parts of you right before the election, I think we need this story."

Melody Payne plays Heather, whom she describes as a midwestern Christian woman with three kids and one on the way, who is genuine, passionate, and kind, and tries to do right by people. She says the audience can learn a lot from her character. "Heather has a willingness to try to create relationships with people that she really doesn't understand," Payne says. Payne says her character exemplifies the importance of nuance, and looking beyond the black and white of any situation. "We all have stereotypes of what republicans, democrats, Christians, or any subgroup of the culture is like. If you dig a little deeper and have an open heart, you might find out something new and connect with them on a level you didn't know was possible."

"Human Error" is showing until Sept. 14. For more information, visit townhalltheatre.com

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