

# Theater Review: A Likable Comedy, Duets Can't Transcend Fluff | FrontRow

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Mix two great actors, atypical comedy, and a receptive audience, and you usually have a recipe for an enjoyable evening of drama. In their energetic production of Peter Quilter's *Duets*, Theatre 3 nearly completes that delicious dish.

The celebrated British playwright Quilter (*End of the Rainbow, Glorious*) has put together a two-actor play divided into four vignettes of eight parts with the theme of love among the over 50 set. DFW Critics Forum winner Michael Serrecchia (*Howto Succeed in Business Without Really Trying, Next to Normal*) directs this lighter than air affair of the heart with a deft touch, and an up tempo; however even this quality cast and crew cannot transcend the shallow excrescence of the material.

Quite a few in the audience did appreciate the small amount of inherent charm in recognizing the absurdity of relationship situations, the one-liners, the cutesy aha zingers, and the powerhouse performances by Carol Farabee Blackwood as Woman, and T3 Company Manager, Terry Dobson as Man.

Even though *Duets* has been produced all over the world, Quilter urges theaters to give each section of the play a regional location. This version has sacks of local flavor: Tom Thumb, The Mesquite Rodeo, and Scarborough Faire to name a few. So, in Dallas, we have Jon and Wendy meeting for the first time through an online dating service. Cue hilarious truth vs. fiction realizations.

Houston is the setting for Janet and her gay boss, Barrie. His cynical views on marriage clash with her ardent desires to find the one, even if that one is right in front of her. In San Antonio, divorcing couple Bobby and Shelley make the disastrous, albeit novel, decision to vacation together. The final part takes place in Mesquite where Angela is about to embark on marriage number five while her confirmed bachelor brother of a hayseed, Toby tries to keep her from sudden cold feet with some hot coffee.

Farabee Blackwood displays considerable range in all of her disparate (and desperate!) iterations. Her characterizations are spot-on, and she has a lovely, clarion speaking voice. Speaking of voice, Dobson's was unfortunately not long for the evening I reviewed, although he gave every ounce of effort to get past this hindrance. What started out as a hoarse scratch in his delivery fast became a painful croak that caused some tripping over lines and rough rhythms for both actors. 'Tis much the pity though because Dobson's many portrayals in the play were quite funny, excitable, and extremely likable.

A streamlined set by Bruce R. Coleman depicting a small kitchen and a living room replete with changing city pictures supports the action nicely.