

Theatre Three's 'Greetings' puts the 'fun' in dysfunction

THEATER REVIEW: T3's 'Greetings' is a zippy trip into holiday hell

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In *Season's Greetings*, a typically dysfunctional extended British family gets together for the Christmas weekend. One of the sisters invites a handsome novelist as her houseguest. Naturally, all the women are smitten with him – and that's only the beginning of the problems that crop up.

Theatre Three revived Alan Ayckbourn's comedy in its basement space on Monday in a lively production that milks every last laugh out of the piece. Director Kerry Cole keeps the tempo brisk and throws in lots of sight and sound gags.

Take Emily Gray as the hostess, Belinda. The character is bored and frustrated with her workaholic husband, Neville (Greg Forshay), and keeps making little scenes to try to get his attention. Ms. Gray sets the tone of the production by emphasizing Belinda's self-dramatization. Her gay nonchalance as she zips through the set a couple of times, barely covered by a bright red kimono, is delicious, and she sets off her exit with an alluring toss of her hair.

All this, of course, is for the benefit of the novelist, Clive (David Fluitt). Clive isn't above a certain amount of dramatic self-emphasis himself; quoting his reviews seems to come naturally to a guy who has just established himself with a best-seller. Ms. Gray and Mr. Fluitt display a lot of chemistry in their scenes of flirtation, too, laying it on too thickly to just the right degree.

Of course, Clive has chemistry with all the ladies. Belinda's sister Rachael (Sara Lovett), who invited him in the first place, keeps throwing herself at him and then un-throwing herself; she's profoundly ambivalent about the whole idea of sex. Phyllis, the alcoholic sister-in-law (Leslie Turner), seems to be interested in literary chat, but she's hanging onto more than Clive's every word. Even Pattie, the put-upon mother of three (Julie Painter), gets positively giddy when Clive's around.

The two older men indulge in their own share of histrionics. Bernard (Stan Graner) does hilariously elaborate warm-ups before starting a dress rehearsal of the boring puppet show he puts on for the kids every year, and Harvey (Cliff Stephens) is so caught up in his own paranoid interpretation of events that he becomes a positive menace.

Sometimes the actors throw a decidedly Texan diphthong into their British accents, but they prove that keeping the tempo up – not to speak of wearing the occasional odd hat – can do worlds for an old comedy.

- Through Dec. 16 at Theatre Too! in the Quadrangle, 2800 Routh St. Runs 135 mins. \$20 to \$30. 214-871-3300, www.theatre3dallas.com.