

'Spike Heels' will raise issues worth pondering

By JULIE McHALE - TimeOut Theater Critic

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MILWAUKEE - Playwright Theresa Rebeck doesn't mess around. She always has something significant to say whether it be through her plays, film or TV scripts, or novels. She is a gritty, edgy writer who manages to raise some issue worth pondering. This is certainly true of "Spike Heels," now playing at the Brumder Mansion.

It is a powerful play about men and women and how they wield their power over each other, forever an interesting and often contentious issue.

The play opens with an impatient pounding on Andrew's door (Josh Perkins) by his volatile neighbor Georgie (Becky Cofta). Andrew has befriended the woman in the apartment above his and has helped her find a good job via his friend Edward. After four months of training, she has moved up to the position of Edward's personal secretary. Then he got too personal, and when she rejected his advances, he threatened to rape her. Her story to Andrew begins this show with a spewing of anger and vitriol from Georgie. We are in for a bumpy ride for the next two hours.



Andrew is fond of Georgie as his friend, but even though Andrew is engaged to marry Lydia, one can sense some sexual tension between these "friends." He is horrified to learn of Edward's aggressiveness and intends to address the issue with him immediately.

Georgie is a "tough babe" who grew up in relative poverty with little parental guidance. She is beautiful and very sexy looking, an asset she has used in her maneuvers in an adult, male-dominated world. She has been promiscuous in the past but is looking to find a little tenderness somewhere. She enjoys Andrew's decency, his intellect and his gentle demeanor, also his helpfulness. What she objects to sometimes is his tendency to want to transform her into an ideal woman of his specifications, instead of accepting her as she is. (Shades of "Pygmalion"?)

When we meet Edward (Cory Jefferson Hagen) and Lydia (Brittany Curran) we learn the history of their past relationships as well. They have also been pretty free and easy with short-lived sexual alliances, but you sense in all of them, that something significant is missing in their lives and none of them is particularly satisfied with their choices.

Things really heat up when too much alcohol fuels the revelation of deep secrets and jealous resentments. There is even a physical fight between Andrew and Edward and the threat of one from Georgie by means of her spiked heels. The spike heels are a metaphor for the pressure put upon women to be sexy and attractive, even if the efforts cause great discomfort and cost.

How things get worked out, if you can call it that, is paradoxical. Lydia and Georgie forge a strong connection, and even Andrew and Edward begin to understand each other and realize that they're not as different as they and we thought they were. All four characters so beautifully portrayed are flawed but

lovable, too. Director JJ Gatesman did a good job of setting the pace and drawing genuine emotion from all the actors. It was fascinating to watch.

“Spike Heels”

The play runs through Saturday at the Brumder Mansion, 3046 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee. Call 414-388-9104 or visit www.milwaukeeentertainmentgroup.com.