



ENTERTAINMENT

## 2 one-acts equal only 1 great reason to watch

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A prostitute (Gia Crovatin) visits a man (Larry Pine) in Neil LaBute's one-act, staged by Marco Calvani, who wrote the other one-act. Sadly, both lack dramatic resonance.  
Photo: Steven Schreiber

As the title suggests, there's a gimmick behind "AdA (Author Directing Author)," an evening of one-acts by rising Italian playwright Marco Calvani and the ubiquitous Neil LaBute: Each writer has staged the other's work.

But novelty alone doesn't have much impact on these forced efforts. Their saving grace is the ensemble, filled as it is with dynamic pros like Estelle Parsons, Craig Bierko and Larry Pine.

A program note for Calvani's "Things of This World" quotes Karl Marx, who derides money for transforming "love into hate, hate into love . . . servant into master, master into servant." That gives us a clue about this short work concerning an unnamed, elderly and wealthy woman (Parsons), her put-upon butler (Bierko), and her husband (Pine), who mainly sits on the sidelines without uttering a word.

At first the woman loudly rebukes the servant for using the washing machine when the heater is on, resulting in a power outage. For good measure, she slaps him in the face, though he doesn't even wince.

But as the play goes on, the balance of power between them shifts as the true nature of their relationship is made clear.

There are echoes here of Pinter and Albee, but it all adds up to very little — although the sight of the strapping, 6-foot-2 Bierko sitting on the petite Parsons' lap is both humorous and alarming.

LaBute's "Lovely Head" — the title is a double entendre — is similarly misleading at first in its portrayal of a middle-aged man (Pine) and the sexy prostitute (Gia Crovatin) who shows up at his apartment for what is apparently a regular appointment.

The playwright's penchant for provocative twists, as seen in such plays as "The Shape of Things," is all too familiar, so we're basically counting the minutes waiting for the big reveal. When it does arrive, like clockwork, it fails to induce the expected shock.

At least LaBute's gift for snappy dialogue is here as well. When her john says that he would rather die than perform the sexual act to which the title refers, she tartly responds, "Aren't we picky?" And a series of pratfalls as he periodically slips on a wet floor produces funny if cheap laughs. But this vignette, like the earlier piece, lacks dramatic resonance.

The evening is best appreciated as a vehicle for its strong cast, especially Parsons, the one-time "Roseanne" star who, at age 84, shows absolutely no signs of slowing down. After this short engagement, her program bio informs us, she'll return to Broadway's "Nice Work If You Can Get It." They're lucky to have her.

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