



Biting comedic play displays playwright's wit

By Bob Evans

Brian Paulette/The Living Room
Theatre



“The Grave” sounds like a really dark bummer and downer, but when the playwright is Forrest Attaway, what you expect never equals what you see; and in this case, you expect something dark and gloomy, but in the spirit of Attaway, he had created a comedic play in two acts.

Attaway’s play “The Grave” debuted in the KC Fringe Festival in 2016 in the one-hour format. Since then, he added a second act and created a full play that keeps the laughs coming from start to finish. The original Fringe piece created the most uncomfortable meeting of the current and former wife of a deceased man.

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The wives have never met until at the burial site. Friendship, acceptance, and resolve just do not fit together like they might in a 30-minute family-centered TV sitcom. Instead, Attaway created the most hilarious set of barbs as the women meet and discover more about the deceased “Mitchell.”

The barbs fly. Just when you think you have heard the most sharp knife-to-the-heart barb from one, the recipient strikes back with an even more bitchy jab. From the onset, the most awkward situation becomes more awkward by the minute, as the bounds of civility lay among the burnt offerings.

What makes this meeting even more intricate, the two women are expected to man the shovels and physically bury Mitchell. Why the difficulty here? The women are recipients of a life insurance policy. But, to claim their half, they must participate in the burial. If one does not fulfill the task, she forfeits her half of the million dollar policy.

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What happens between the two women from different worlds keeps the audience gasping and laughing throughout the act. Even though the writing of Attaway and his razor-sharp wit, the performances of Peggy Friesen and Amy Elizabeth Attaway propels this comedy to sublime heights. The chemistry and timing of the two ladies makes the comedy even more comic. Their expressions; their timing; their physical conflict makes “The Grave” one of the best shows of the season.

At the end of Act I, no one knows where Act II will take them. At intermission, viewers were discussing their thoughts on what might occur in Act II.



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Act II gives more insight into Mitchell and his son, Charles. Again, Attaway creates the most awkward situation as the father and son meet at the grandfather’s burial. As they talk over the grave, jab and barbs continue. The audience learns about Mitchell’s past and Charles’ present.

As a junior in high school, Charles, played with attitude by

Mathew Ellis. His counterpart, Mitchell, played superbly by Curtis Smith, uses his dry, flat delivery to accentuate the awkwardness and comedy of the situation. (For those who remember and watched TV's Cheers and Frazier, Smith has that flat delivery similar to Lilith (BeBe Newirth.) Again, the chemistry between the two men just make this comic act informative through laughter.

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While the four actors develop and wear their characters like their own skin, credit director Rusty Sneary who directed the piece and choreographed the movement and the power shifts among the characters in each Act. His precision direction and movement pulls the audience inside the show, the characters, and the humorous interchanges.

The time-jumping play runs about 100 minutes with a 15 minute intermission. Act I begins in the summer 2010 and Act II time-travels back to 1995.



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When seeing this show, understand how the detail oriented production crew created this comic piece. The production crew

is: Lacey Pachecco, stage manager; David Kiehl, sound design; Nichole Jaja, lighting design; Shawna Journagan, properties design; Regina Weller, Shawna Journagan, scenic artists; Kyle Dyck, technical director; Bradley J. Thomas, box-office/house manager; Brian Paulette, poster design/photographer.

“The Grave” ends this week. For tickets, purchase via [The Living Room website](#).

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