

Theater review

3 sisters share more than genes

By **HOLLY JOHNSON**
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

"The Sisters Rosensweig" sounds like the title for a fairy story from the dark woods of northern Europe, a cautionary tale of redemption and renewal.

But Wendy Wasserstein's vibrant, funny play about three sisters, offered by Profile Theatre Project, is much more complex than that, and funnier, too. It's a celebration of life amid doubt and loneliness, struggles with self-identity amid the richness of various cultural choices.

Wasserstein said she wrote this play with inspiration from Anton Chekhov, George S. Kaufman, Moss Hart and Noel Coward, and indeed all of them crop up somewhere during the evening, although Wasserstein's dialogue is all her own. Director Jane Unger has pulled together a flawless cast, kept the pace brisk, let the delicious humor flow naturally, yet honored deeper themes — politics, love, family, careers and the elusive pursuit of happiness.

Three Jewish sisters meet at Sarah's posh house in London to celebrate her 54th birthday in August 1991, the eve of the dissolution of Russia. Sarah (Barbara Kerr) is looked up to by her youngest sibling Pfeni (Amanda Soden), a redhead with a penchant for Third World travel who has just blown in from Bombay. Gorgeous Teitelbaum (Karla Mason) joins the two in her faux Chanel suit, strutting proudly because she's famous in New England for her popularity as a radio show psychologist. ("You heard of Dr Pepper? I'm Dr. Gorgeous.")

Add Sarah's teenage daughter Tess (Ariel Aver), and the conversation crackles with wit and insight, particularly when Pfeni's bisexual boyfriend Geoffrey, a British theater director, drops by. Leif Norby portrays him with irresistible abandon.

When Sarah meets the irrepressible Mervyn Kant, love blossoms. Shelly Lipkin's sketch of Mervyn is uncannily simple and simply hilarious.

Still musing over how their mother raised them, the sisters cuddle on the couch, pondering happiness and what their late mother passed on to them. "We're happy," says one. "We just aren't our mother's kind of happy."

Continues at 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays through April 22 at Theater! Theatre! 3430 S. E. Belmont St.; \$10-\$28; 503-242-0080.

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