

South End News

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Conversation starter

Home tackles the 'T' in LGBT

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Although Queer Soup's latest production *Home* will open at the Boston Center for the Arts on Friday the 13th, the "dramedy" seems to have been conceived under a lucky star. This summer, after doing a staged reading of the original play at the Boston Playwright Theatre, Jess Martin and her fellow Queer Soupers found out that a play the BCA had originally lined up for January dropped out. So they got to step in.

"It just seemed a little too fortuitous to let it pass," she said, laughing. "And now, we're just excited to let this thing come alive."

"This thing" is a 90-minute dramatic comedy exploring the spectrum of gender identity through the complicated revelation of a long-kept family secret. Lulu Edwards (Becca A. Lewis), a lesbian, finds her world rocked by the post-mortem discovery that her recently deceased grandfather died of ovarian cancer — meaning that her Pappi (Toni Amato) was born biologically female. Further complicating matters, Lulu, herself a minister, and her family are part of a greater religious community and Lulu learns that her new love interest, Kai (Karen "Mal" Malme), is a professional drag king. The characters, including Lulu's grandfather in ghostly form and her grandmother, explore the nature of secrecy, gender and ultimately, trans-phobia.

The play was born out of a writing exercise

Martin proposed to the Queer Soup production group, a collective of four gender-queer identified artists that specializes in queer theatre, in which she asked them to each write a scene showing someone discovering a secret.

"This one of the four different ones that we started really resonated with us," she said. The Queer Soup members hope that the tale of loss and gender identity will also resonate, on some level, with audiences.

"We're excited to see how it resonates," she said, noting that this is Queer Soup's first collective attempt at drama. "The biggest issue is tackling language, especially the language of gender, and the language of religion, which are very much steeped in what [beliefs] people personally hold... Not everybody who walks in the door is going to understand the transgender story, knowing which pronoun to use, and not everyone is going to think that gender can be a little more amorphous than biology."

Playing on the unique nature of the BCA's Black Box Theatre, the play takes no breaks in its 90 minutes — no set or scene changes, no blackouts, no intermission and at no point do the characters leave the stage. While experienced theatre-goers should have no problem with this, it does effectively mean that the audience becomes a silent fifth character in the four-person play.

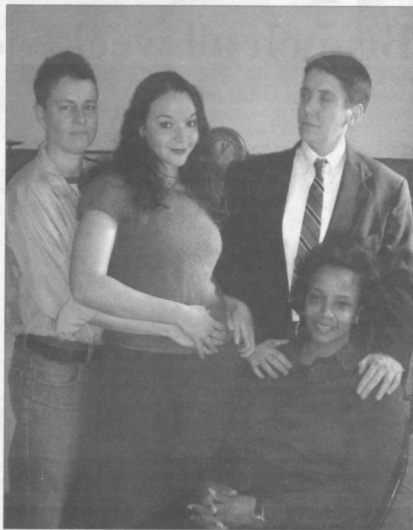
"There's always something happening, and the audience is free to look where they want to look," said Martin. "I think that's something we wanted to get across in this play, be curious, look."

That structure is part of what Queer

Soup hopes the play will do as a whole, to make people curious and open up a dialogue about sexual and gender identity. "What we hope to achieve by presenting this work is just opening up that conversation with people," continued Martin. "If there's acceptance, great, and if there's 'Okay, now at least I've heard this story,' it will challenge people, but also get them talking."

Audiences will have the opportunity to talk about these issues with a panel discussion on Jan. 22, with local transgender activist Gunner Scott, and again at a post-show reception on Jan. 29, with various invited church groups (mostly, says Martin, Unitarian Universalist). And it's not a conversation, says Martin, that has been had enough, even within the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender community.

"Within the LGBT community, often time times the T is its own section, floating off," said Martin. "I'm really curious to see



The cast of *Home*.

what the post-show conversations will be."

Home opens Jan. 13 and runs through Feb. 14, at the *Black Box Theatre*, 539 Tremont St. To purchase tickets, contact the *Boston TheatreScene.com* Box Office at 617.933.8600, e-mail boxoffice@bostontheatrescene.com or visit www.bostontheatrescene.com.