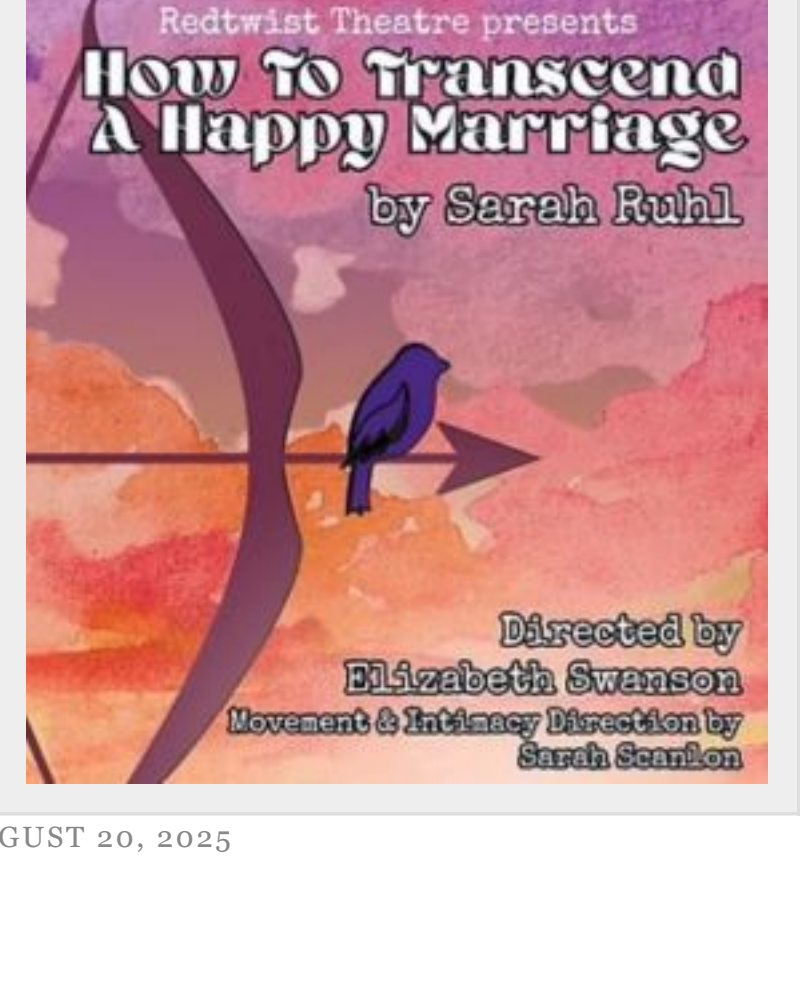


Theater Review: HOW TO TRANSCEND A HAPPY MARRIAGE (Redtwist Theatre)



by MITCHELL OLDFHAM on AUGUST 20, 2025
in THEATER-CHICAGO

Redtwist's Smashing New Play Rattles the Status Quo with Laughter and Wisdom

Are there limits to happiness? Can any one of us remotely comprehend the countless forms it can take? Those two questions rest at the heart of **Sarah Ruhl's** rakish rebel of a play, ***How to Transcend a Happy Marriage***, now stirring things up at **Redtwist Theatre** in Edgewater. Sublimely directed by **Elizabeth Swanson**, it takes us places many have been curious to explore but would be extremely hesitant to consciously venture.



Carlos Treviño (Paul), Joshua Servantez (David), William Delforge (Freddie), Monique Marshaun (Jane), Joe Zarrow (Michael) and Tatiana Pavela (George)



Carlos Treviño (Paul), Shaina Toledo (Pip) and William Delforge (Freddie)

Enjoying wine and conversation,two couples chat contentedly in a comfortable and urbane living room. They're friends, indeed close friends who know each other well enough to relax fully around one another and share broad, free-flowing conversations together. It's Jane and Michael's home, and as they sit together on their couch, her hand on his thigh, you sense how satisfied and secure they are as a unit. Their friends Paul (**Carlos Treviño**) and Georgia (**Tatiana Pavela**) — who goes by George — are visiting. Altogether, they're an attractive foursome, nudging toward middle-age, settled, confident, articulate. When Jane (**Monique Marshaun**) brings up a new temp in her office, the other three become increasingly interested when Jane tells them the temp, Pip, divulged to her that she was in a polyamorous relationship with two men. Questions fly. Was she pretty? "Yes, she's beautiful." Many of the queries that follow, some with all the racy innuendo you'd expect, are wonderfully hilarious and expose our natural fascination with the boldly unconventional. Inventive and playfully sophisticated, humor is also one the play's appealing mainstays.



Joe Zarrow, Monique Marshaun, Carlos Treviño, Tatiana Pavela, Elonte Quick (Jenna)

Beyond her appearance, all Jane knows about Pip is that she also has a lot of energy. But as she continues to consider her co-worker, she remembers there was one other provocative detail about her: She kills her own meat — conscientiously and ethically, of course. As Jane understands it, the practice stems from a need to address an iron deficiency.



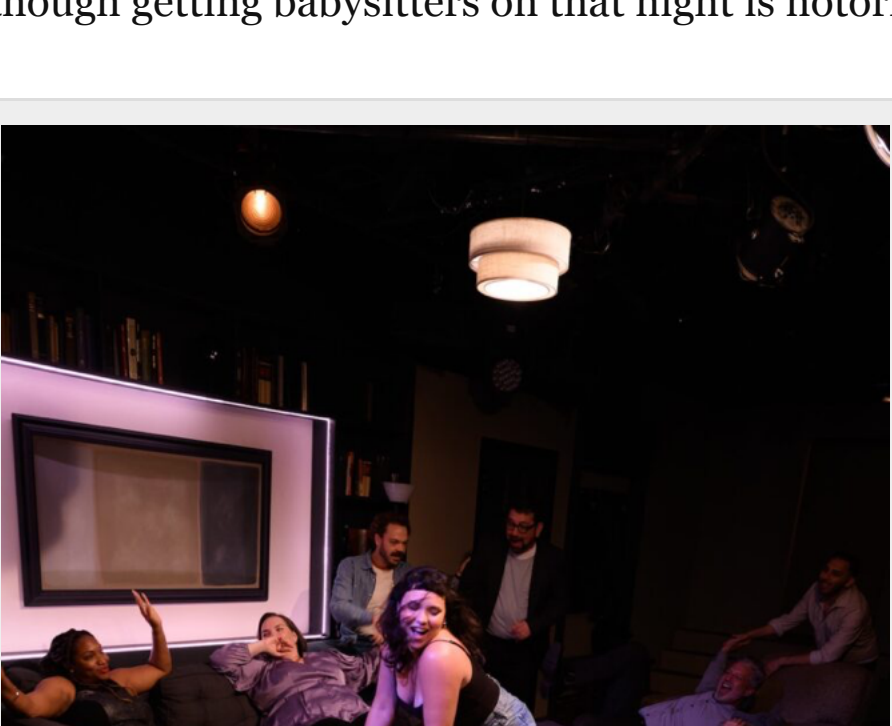
Joshua Servantez (David), Joe Zarrow (Michael), William Delforge (Freddie), Carlos Treviño (Paul), Shaina Toledo (Pip) and Tatiana Pavela (George)

During the discussion and inquiries about Pip, we gain a fuller appreciation for the cohesiveness and tacit respect these couples enjoy as married entities. Jane and Michael (**Joe Zarrow**) are as seamless as a single block of stone. George is a more idiosyncratic character whom her husband Paul seems to quite admire. Thanks to **Sarah Scanlon's** astute intimacy direction, you can tell that when it's time to rally, he and George will do it as an irrepresible team.



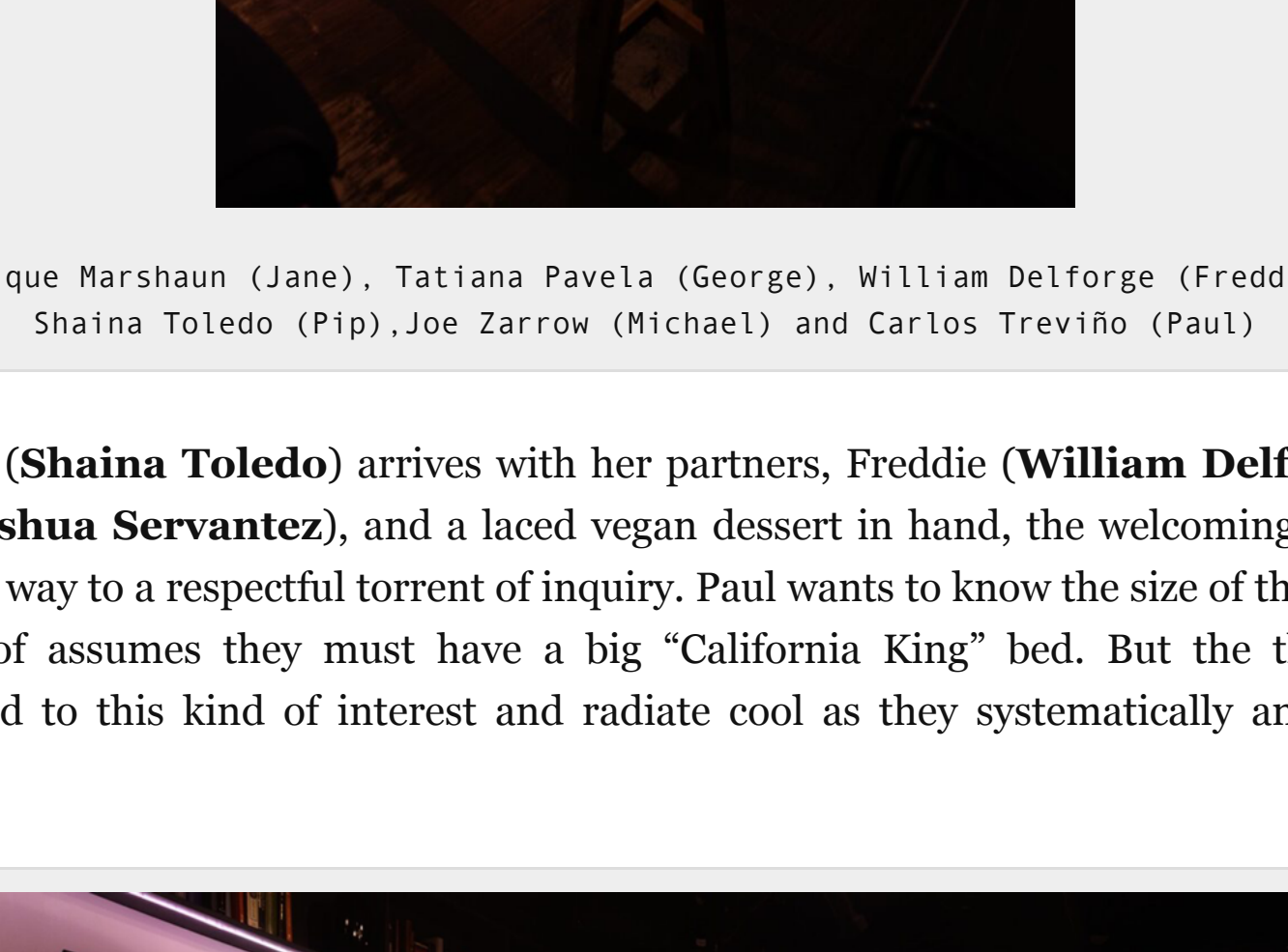
Joshua Servantez (David), William Delforge (Freddie), Shaina Toledo (Pip), Tatiana Pavela (George), Monique Marshaun (Jane) and Carlos Treviño (Paul)

Still, everyone remains very curious about Pip, and the two couples decide to invite her over for dinner. Calendars and phones in hand, the try to find a compatible date and land on New Year's Eve, even though getting babysitters on that night is notoriously tricky.



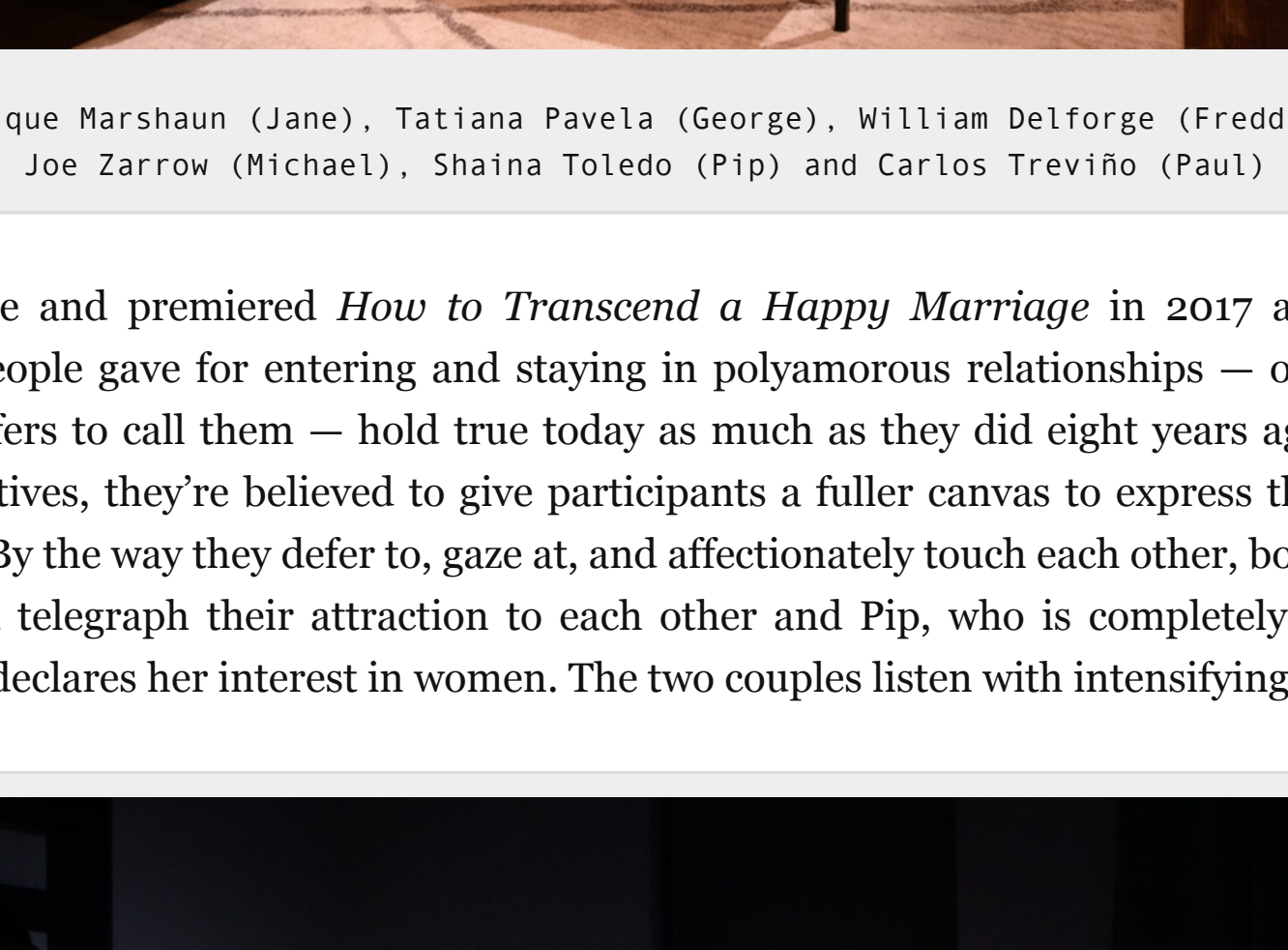
Monique Marshaun (Jane), Tatiana Pavela (George), William Delforge (Freddie), Shaina Toledo (Pip), Joe Zarrow (Michael) and Carlos Treviño (Paul)

When Pip (**Shaina Toledo**) arrives with her partners, Freddie (**William Delforge**) and David (**Joshua Servantez**), and a laced vegan dessert in hand, the welcoming cordiality soon gives way to a respectful torrent of inquiry. Paul wants to know the size of their shower and sort of assumes they must have a big "California King" bed. But the three seem accustomed to this kind of interest and radiate cool as they systematically answer each question.



Monique Marshaun (Jane), Tatiana Pavela (George), William Delforge (Freddie), Joe Zarrow (Michael), Shaina Toledo (Pip) and Carlos Treviño (Paul)

Ruhl wrote and premiered *How to Transcend a Happy Marriage* in 2017 and all the reasons people gave for entering and staying in polyamorous relationships — or triads as David prefers to call them — hold true today as much as they did eight years ago. Among other positives, they're believed to give participants a fuller canvas to express their sexual interests. By the way they defer to, gaze at, and affectionately touch each other, both Freddie and David telegraph their attraction to each other and Pip, who is completely forthright when she declares her interest in women. The two couples listen with intensifying interest.



Shaina Toledo (Pip) and Tatiana Pavela (George)

By the time the drinks and whatever was in the dessert kick in, their curiosity morphs into sometime more "feral"; indiscriminately, eyes start to openly appraise and send out tentacles of lustful intent in both expected and unexpected directions. Sometimes, hands cautiously follow suit.



Shaina Toledo (Pip), Tatiana Pavela (George), William Delforge (Freddie), Joe Zarrow (Michael), Carlos Treviño (Paul) and Monique Marshaun (Jane)

And though it all culminates in a manner you'd think inevitable, it's what happens after that makes the story rock. Elements of guilt and denial are present, but the overriding sensation that flies from the stage is one of transformation — hushed, but unmistakable, and something not one the four friends are ready to acknowledge or confront. Because Jane and Michael's daughter Jenna (**Elonie Quick**) comes home unexpectedly New Year's Eve and catches them in the throes of discovery, they're more preoccupied with being embarrassed. And tellingly, more than a little defiant. The significance of their collective revelation will at least for the moment remain sublimated.



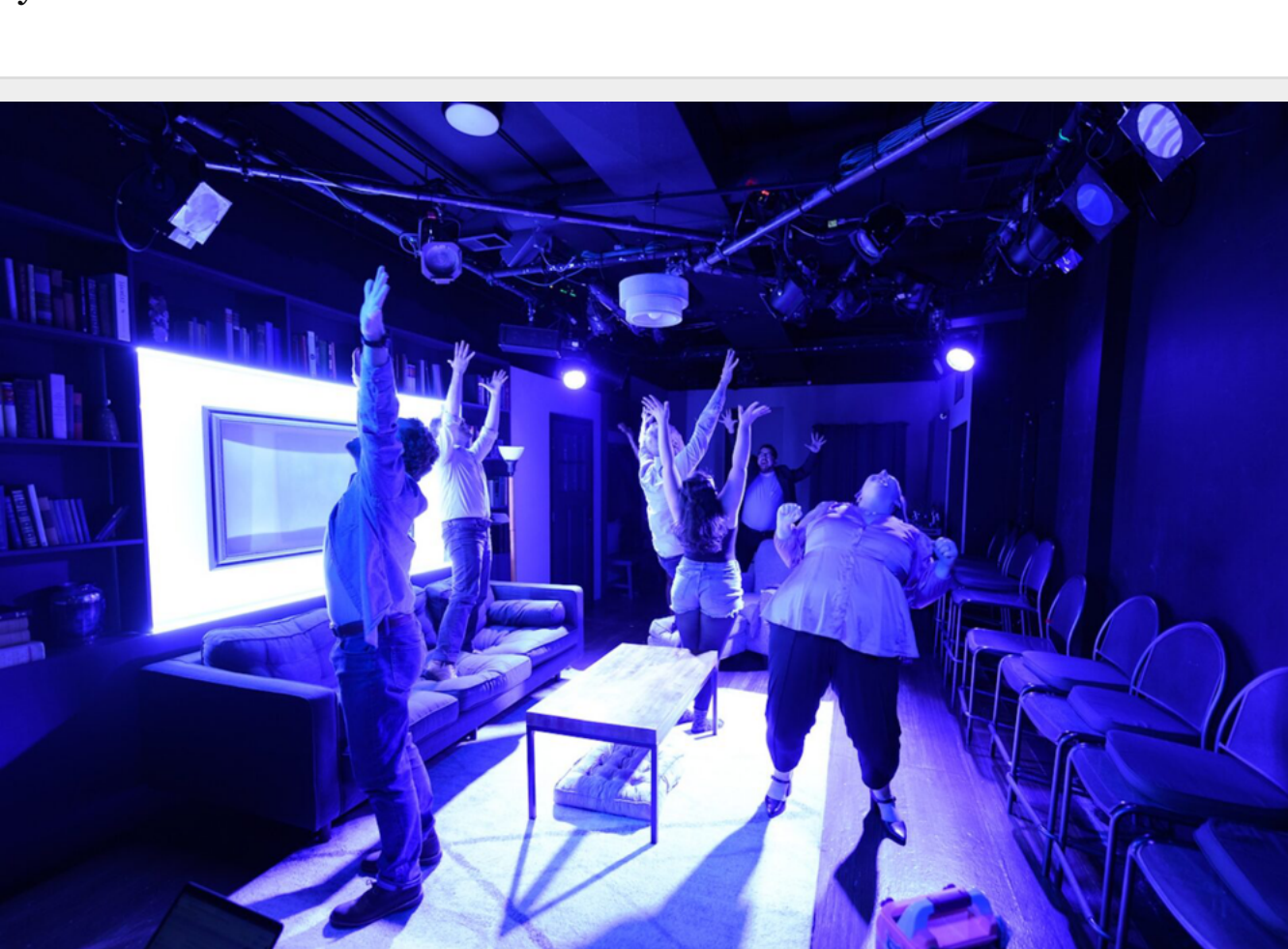
Shaina Toledo (Pip), Tatiana Pavela (George), William Delforge (Freddie), Joe Zarrow (Michael), Carlos Treviño (Paul) and Monique Marshaun (Jane)

This is where everything begins to shine with extra luster. The top-notch acting and directing; the mindful perfection of **Rose Johnson's** scenic design; and the language of **Marquecia Jordan's** clothing to wonderfully convey aspects of personality and character all converge to do one thing — provide eloquent underpinning for Ruhl's superb assessment of both our limitations and our potential capabilities as human beings. Much more than a treatise on not knocking what you haven't tried, *How to Transcend a Happy Marriage* shows there are horizons beyond the ones we think we know about; and perhaps even more horizons beyond them.



Shaina Toledo (Pip), Tatiana Pavela (George), William Delforge (Freddie), Joshua Servantez (David), Monique Marshaun (Jane) and Joe Zarrow (Michael)

photos by **Tom McGrath**/TCMCGPhotography



Shaina Toledo (Pip), Tatiana Pavela (George), William Delforge (Freddie), Joshua Servantez (David), Monique Marshaun (Jane) and Joe Zarrow (Michael)

It's hard to imagine a production telling this story as compellingly as seen here. Putting together such a formidable cast certainly contributes to this belief and casting director **Eileen Dixon** desires praise for its formation. Both pivotal characters, Pavela and Toledo as Pip, are uncommon standouts whose performances make Redtwist's take on Ruhl's handiwork resonate so memorably.

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How to Transcend a Happy Marriage
Redtwist Theatre 1044 W. Bryn Mawr
two hours including a 15 minute intermission
Thurs-Sat at 7:30; Sun at 3:30 (understudy performances August 31 and September 11)
ends on September 21, 2025
for tickets, visit [Redtwist](#)

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