



# REVIEW: HOW TO TRANSCEND A HAPPY MARRIAGE @ REDTWIST THEATRE

Written by John Accrocco



(L to R) Joe Zarrow (Michael), Monique Marshaun (Jane), Carlos Treviño (Paul), Tatiana Pavela (George) and Elonie Quick (Jenna) in Sarah Ruhl's *How to Transcend a Happy Marriage*, from Redtwist Theatre, directed by Elizabeth Swanson, now playing through September 21st.

*Photo by Tom McGrath Photography.*

Is there a harder emotion to define than love? Its forms are various and seemingly subjective, something you can only know when you feel it. Sarah Ruhl takes on the topic in her 2017 play *How to Transcend a Happy Marriage* now playing at Redtwist Theatre. Directed by Elizabeth Swanson, this quirky comedy drops audiences right into the dinner party conversation of two married couples discussing polyamory.

Jane (Monique Marshaun) has a new coworker involved in a polycule with two other men. After dinner,

she regales her husband Michael (Joe Zarrow) and friends with this titillating tale. George (Tatiana Pavela) and her husband Paul (Carlos Travino) are fascinated by polyamorous Pip (Shaina Toledo). For George, this anecdote is nearly life changing. Though both couples laugh it off as some sort of fad, they hatch a plan to host the throuple—Pip and her two lovers Freddie (William Delforge) and David (Joshua Servantez) for New Year's Eve.

Pip and her lovers are exactly the free spirits you'd assume they'd be. Ruhl sets up the classic old versus young divide on traditionalism and politics. The first act plays like a good episode of "And Just Like That", (if that's been your bag). Characters feel familiar because what they're very politely discussing in person are the same things we see endlessly dissected online by think pieces. While Pip, Freddie and David are prodded with questions about their lifestyle, the sexual tension between Jane, Michael, George and Paul starts to heat up.

The evening has a profound effect on both couples. In typical Sarah Ruhl style, there's a flirtation with the fantastic. Reality has a lot of constraints when it comes to storytelling and while a sitcom has to play by the rules, Sarah Ruhl does not. That's what makes her plays such a sensory feast. One moment both feet are grounded in the reality of these two ordinary couples and the next, a fantastical twist that adds a bit of poetry to their unraveling.

*How to Transcend a Happy Marriage* feels like Sarah Ruhl's version of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, only in this version, it's the younger set who win the "get the guests" game. Ruhl's play is much gentler in its messaging but both plays explore enduring love from the perspectives of new love and worn in love. Ruhl adds in an extra layer of what feels like "kink" that asks its middle-aged audience "what's the big deal if you like it and it's not hurting anyone?"

Redtwist's production is seductive in its presentation. The performance space is fittingly very intimate as this is a play about romantic and platonic intimacy. At times audiences feel like they could just grab an olive off the coffee table and join in the lively discussion. However, the barrier between audience and cast is clearly defined by stellar performances. Particularly Tatiana Pavela as George. Shaina Toledo also really embodies her counterculture character in a way that exudes both confidence and sexuality.

*How to Transcend a Happy Marriage* is a humorous but deep look at the ways in which we love and categorize love. Though mostly a play about heterosexual love, this feels like a queer play in that it

asks a presumably straight audience to open their minds about sexuality and gender norms. Ruhl makes an elevated commentary on non-monogamous relationships from a place of curiosity instead of shock, which is also how audiences should approach this work. Whatever your inclinations are, this play asks important questions about what it means to love and be loved, even if it looks different than you imagined.

*Through September 21 at Redtwist Theatre. 1044 W Bryn Mawr Avenue. 773-728-7529*

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