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Sisters get raucous in 'Queen of Bingo'

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Courtesy photo.

Shane Partlow portrays Sis, and
Rowan Joseph portrays Babe, in
"The Queen of Bingo."

It can be difficult to take a scenario of two elderly women playing bingo and create a comedy smash; however, at "The Queen of Bingo" performance at the California Center for the Arts in Escondido on January 23, every member of the audience got at least a few chuckles and guffaws out of the show.

Shane Partlow and Rowan Joseph played sisters Sis and Babe, respectively, and were able to not only convincingly play elderly women but also perform in such a way that even at their worst, they were still endearing to the audience.

The only other character in the play is Father Mac, played by Kevin M. Horton. Father Mac is fresh out of the "cemetery," or seminary, and is also known as Mac Daddy by the choirboys (unless any policemen are around).

Once audience members entered the theater, they were immediately welcomed in with their own bingo cards and by Father Mac, who made sure all the "Protestants" were in their assigned seats. While he doesn't have the most active role in the play, Father Mac earns laughs from the audience with his Protestant humor.

The opening of the play was a bit slow and Sis and Babe's characters took a while to fully bloom. However, once things got rolling, so did the laughs from the audience.

The sisters spent a large majority of their time grumbling about their seats, which were taken by a big lady wearing stretch pants, and gossiping about different ladies from the hall.

But throughout the laughs, there were moments when a deeper look went into what makes Babe and Sis tick, revealing their inner selves to the audience.

Sis spends every night out playing Bingo at different church halls and may or may not have a gambling addiction. If she does have an addiction, she makes a convincingly reasonable case as to why it's okay to have one.

Babe, however, pulls at heartstrings with her story. The entire audience feels for her as she shares how her husband left her, even though she was slim and trim, and her battle with her weight since then. The audience can almost hear her agony as she considers turning down a potential date because nothing in her closet fits her and she refuses to go up to the dreaded "size 18."

Sis tries to calm her, but Babe won't hear it. She crawls up onto the table to strip off her muumuu in order to prove exactly how fat she is, with Sis right behind her doing her best to cover her up.

In the midst of Babe's nervous breakdown, the mood changes abruptly, but only because she wins the big Bingo game. True sisterly spirit shines throughout the play, as only Babe and Sis can understand each other's quirks and make the other see reason.

During the play intermission, the audience was invited to play Bingo for a grand prize. Father Mac gave the winning player the bird: a Butterball turkey, that is.

"The Queen of Bingo" was not without its glitches; the first minutes of the play were lost because of a microphone problem and the background music was too loud and obnoxious for opening scenes. Some of the jokes made were too dated and the only audience members who were laughing were those who were a few years late on certain pop culture topics.

All in all, "The Queen of Bingo" was a fun show that was able to draw a mixed audience. It had the rare ability to get laughs throughout the play and would actually be enjoyable if viewed more than once.

For more information on the California Center for the Arts in Escondido, go to www.artcenter.org.