



If I simply tell you to go see *My Thing Of Love*, will that be endorsement enough for you? The reason I'm asking is that so much of the pleasure of watching Alexandra Gersten's quirkily wonderful and unpredictable comedy (or is it a drama?) is in not knowing what's going to happen. In fact, even a quick glance at the cast of characters midway through act one spoiled one of the surprises for me. So how about if I just say "Go" and end the review here? All right, I guess I wouldn't be doing my job if my full length review was shorter than a capsule, so here goes. I'll do my best to tell you about *My Thing Of Love* without giving too much away. Elly and Jack are a 30something married couple with a couple of young kids. It's morning. Jack is getting dressed for work and Elly recounts to Jack a bit of advice she's recently gotten from a transvestite of all people. "If you want to know if a man is lying to you, look him deeply in the eyes and if his mouth is moving, he's lying." It soon becomes clear that Jack has been lying to Elly about something ... something major. "What's this all about?" he asks her. "It's about disappointment," she replies. "I'm unhappy. I know something." She tells Jack what she knows. Jack just stands there. "You're not breathing," she says. Jack has put his tie on backwards. The scene is at once funny and tragic. Like the play itself, it defies categorization. Is *My Thing Of Love* a drama? Not really. There are far too many laughs. Is it a comedy? Not exactly. Not with the stark pain of some of its scenes? Is it a dramedy? No, that's far too schmaltzy a term for a play that's razor sharp. One thing *My Thing Of Love* is is a "fly on the wall" play, one where you truly feel as if you're observing real people and their real lives from the safety of invisibility. Gersten has written crackling good dialog for her quartet of characters, especially for Elly who is, in her own words, unable to "edit my mouth." In a scene which starts out romantic, Elly suddenly seethes at Jack, "You're a killer! You just killed a lovely moment we were having!" Gersten's Jack is a portrait of a man in crisis. "It's every day," he tells Elly, "and it starts when I shave." Elly's not doing much better. "I've got a kind of bad cramp in the middle of my head," she says. And what about one of their daughters who's in the habit of standing atop her teacher's desk ("She wants to be tall," explains Elly) and shouting, "Wake up you bastard! The bomb is coming! Wake up!" Only a writer of great originality could come up with the line "I love (insert name of character) so much and I don't know how you fit in," spoken by someone to someone, but you'll have to see the show to find out who says it and to whom and why this line is so striking ... and funny. If a director's accomplishments can be seen in the performances given by his actors (and I believe that it can), then Darin Anthony (*Heads, Burn This*) has done terrific work here—as always. Witness the following: In a two week period which has already seen two of the most superlative serio-comic performances of this or any year (Barbara Gruen in *A Good Smoke* and Frances Fisher in *Sexy Laundry*), there is now a third name to add to the list. As Elly, the sensational Johanna McKay (a young Brenda Vaccaro) gives a performance of such power and spontaneity, it's like witnessing spontaneous combustion on the stage. Acting students should be assigned to watch McKay and learn from her work what it means to be "in the moment."

Nothing seems planned; everything is happening right then and there in a performance that cannot possibly be exactly the same two nights in a row. Josh Randall also does excellent work as Jack, keeping the character sympathetic enough that we feel for him when he is found out and yet duplicitous enough that we want to shout out to Elly, "Kick him to the curb." Randall is the type of actor who can just as easily play hero as villain, and here he is both. He can also play just plain human, as when he declares, "Sometimes I can feel the hope just pissing out of me," and you believe him, and empathize. Heather Fox (I'm not going to tell you who she plays, and I suggest you not even look at your program until intermission) is a real find. With her slender, angular beauty, she can play sweet and she can play sensual with equal ease. In a scene opposite McKay, she is Miss Prissy to McKay's Ms. Tornado. Later, she morphs into a captivating sex kitten, while always remaining her character's peculiar self as when, at one point, she blurts out "Emergency! Emergency! I am being tampered with" because she heard it from a talking car alarm. Completing the foursome is John Schumacher as the elementary school guidance counselor to end all guidance counselors. Pudgy, goateed, bow-tied and balding, with a Tony the Tiger pen hanging from around his neck along with glasses and a name badge, Schumacher's "Garn" is a trip and a half, as when he asks Fox, "Has anyone ever told you you look like Edna St. Vincent Millay? A dour girl." As Elly herself says, from the moment Schumacher walks on stage, it's a "non-stop side show," as when he begins singing for no reason, and when told to stop, shouts out, "WE WERE TRAINED TO SING!" (By this I assume he means "we elementary school counselors.") Kudos to both actor and playwright. Dan Jenkins (lighting design) and David B. Marling (sound design) have worked here as a team, and a brilliant one. Individually, each does his accustomed fine work. Jenkins' truly artistic lighting is as integral to the production's power as are Gersten's words and the actors' performances, and Marling's sound design is as well, e.g. when a rapid heartbeat accompanies Jack's reaction to being found out. There is one particularly amazing moment where sound and lighting combine for a brief but powerful instant in which one character suddenly realizes just who it is he/she is speaking to. Tom Buderwitz has come up with two wonderful, and very different, set designs for the production. Act 1's messy living room has that lived in look, with crayons, stuffed animals, a dolly, and a tub of Clay Babies on the coffee table. The audience returns from intermission to a gorgeous set change; the living room has become a comfortable suburban bedroom, complete with full sized double bed. Both sets feature a semi-see-through wall to the bathroom, used effectively in both acts. Kudos also to Sherry Linnell for her excellent costumes. Amazingly, I do believe I've written a review which doesn't give away too many of A Thing Of Love's unexpected twists and turns! Hopefully, it's also one which has conveyed the many charms of Gersten's creation without spoiling its many surprises. Do try to see My Thing Of Love, not just because it's a wonderful play and production, but also to support Martin and Katherine Bedoian's marvelous Syzygy Theatre Group which, instead of opting for the "99-seat plan" actually pays its actors and stage managers for rehearsals and performances. Syzygy does only two or three productions a year, but quality most definitely trumps quantity here. After Tender and Goblin Market, My Thing Of Love makes it three winners in a row! GTC Burbank, 1111-B WestOlive Ave., Burbank. (Center of George Izay Park). Through April 5. Fridays and Saturdays a 8:00. Sundays at 2:00. Thursday March 27 at 8:00. Reservations: 800-838-3006 or www.syzygytheatre.org.

--Steven Stanley
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