

# Midland Reporter-Telegram

November 8, 2013

The Mavericks are a jolly, zany bunch of later-day vagabonds who have made their home in a Veterans building replete with bar, motorbikes growling outside and some of the least comfortable audience seats in the history of theater. However, the chairs are rendered superlative by a choice of spectacularly decorated cushions to the left that the audience can arrange as they wish to make their seating arrangements more comfy. It is all part of the charm of a Maverick Players show.

Their latest offering was a world premiere of “Gravy Anxiety.” The production illustrates that the Mavericks have hit their stride again after a few hiccups during their location hiatus.

This comedy, written by Rosemary Toohey, takes some comedic staples — family holidays, awkward reunions, bizarre strangers — and turns them into something original. For a start, unlike most plays that have farcical elements, “Gravy Anxiety” does not have awkward entrances and exits, but rather once a character is on the stage he or she stays there — however crowded it gets.

Thus by the end of the first act there are no fewer than 11 actors on stage, so cramped that they can barely move. At first I wondered whether this was a playwriting mistake, but soon realized that it was a clever device that illustrates the sheer claustrophobia of family gatherings. None of the characters can move — either physically or verbally — without influencing the others.

Mary Lou Cassidy plays Amanda, the female half of a couple who may or may not, buy the house of one of the family members. Cassidy brings an energy to the stage that is occasionally absent in some of the other actors. Her numerous aspersions against the “city folks” that she is surrounded by are often perfectly timed.

Another standout is Leanna Blacketter, who plays the teenager Natalie. Natalie likes to give highly detailed descriptions of occurrences that we normally like to avoid — such as the gruesome death that so many turkeys undergo just before Thanksgiving. Amanda takes a great delight in stirring the pot, a trait that Blacketter displays perfectly.

In actual life they are newly-weds, but in “Gravy Anxiety” they portray a couple who are about to get a divorce. Shea and Evelyn Sitz have a great deal of fun playing Mike and Carol, who eventually appear to be reconciling, at least to a degree.

The second act is much shorter than the first, and delves into a surrealist atmosphere as several of the men hum “Love Me Tender” while other characters play out the machinations that this Thanksgiving has given to them. It is powerful, but seems somewhat undeveloped at the moment. Another weakness is the soliloquizing by Mary, the unfortunate host. The idea of breaking the fourth wall and having the audience watch the play as if they are somehow conspirators with her is clever, but as with the surrealism, unfulfilled as currently written.

As a whole “Gravy Anxiety” is a very promising play. Watch out for future Maverick Players productions. They are nearly always entertaining in a delightfully unpretentious and honest manner.

Read more: Maverick Players production is charming, honest - mywesttexas.com: [Entertainment](#)  
Under Creative Commons License: [Attribution](#)