



Michael Patrick Gaffney is a riot in “The Oldest Living Cater Waiter” onstage at the Gateway Theatre through July 9. (Courtesy DC Scarpelli)

Michael Patrick Gaffney is a hilarious ‘Cater Waiter’

Performer a tour de force in delightful one-man show

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By Lawrence Helman

From the start, it's clear that the "The Oldest Living Cater Waiter" at the Gateway Theatre — a one-person tour de force written and performed by Michael Patrick Gaffney — is going to be good.

Gaffney is a quintuple threat. He acts, sings, dances, writes and caters in the tight, 75-minute pastiche presented by 42nd Street Moon and directed with finesse by Ken Sonkin.

Gaffney tells of pursuing his passion in theater, combined with the reality of having to serve others — literally. He performs on stages and in banquet halls to make ends meet and embodies various characters, voices and athletic high jinks as he presents his life in three courses.

Wearing black attire with "event staff" emblazoned on his back, he comes onstage, where there's an elegantly set round table.

He exits and returns as an older waiter, barely able to do the tasks required, but so willing. Riding a motorized seated scooter, he circles the table, adding items; as it becomes increasingly festooned, the iconic "Sabre Dance" from Khachaturian's ballet "Gayane" plays, to hilarious effect.

With images projected upstage (video and sound design also by Sonkin), he muses of being raised in Oklahoma, finding solace in Billie Sue Thompson, his eighth grade drama teacher, who introduced him to theater history and the importance of deification to the craft. He gets her stance perfectly and does her Texas twang flawlessly.

He moves to California, where his odd jobs include performing in costumes at kid's birthday parties — also hilarious.

Next, he takes orders from diners as a 1940s Warner Bros. gum-chewing waiter, replete with diner-speak, where an order of "fruit cup on the side" becomes "Liberace in the Alley."

His telling of The Potato Skin Incident of 1993, in which he portrays three women ordering lunch, is side-splitting.

He moves to San Francisco, eventually acting in a play, and to his delight, obtaining his Actors' Equity card.

Working as a cater-waiter at elegant parties — more glamorous and easier than restaurant jobs — he loves wearing a tuxedo and learning the fine art of service. His description of guests' excessive alcohol consumption at parties, with more than 20 slang terms for being "plastered," is priceless.

As a slide showing a main course appears on screen (what is “leek and eggplant nage?”), he returns in a top hat and goes into a lightning-service routine (reminiscent of the Waiters’ Gallop in “Hello, Dolly!”) to the frenetic “Sing, Sing, Sing.” With the agility and athletic prowess of Buster Keaton, he spins plates, juggles dinner rolls and swings on a chandelier in homage to Douglas Fairbanks.

In a story about waiting on difficult 1 percenters, including a certain female romance novelist, at a party in Montecito, he starts off calm, then snaps; it’s part mad scene in “Lucia di Lammermoor” and part Marx Brothers.

He shares his work’s down sides — aching feet, back and wrists and popping “catering candy” (Advil) just to maintain — and tells his therapist about having both an actor’s and waiter’s nightmare of not doing well in either profession.

A joy from beginning to end, “The Oldest Living Cater Waiter” is original, well-served and easy to digest. If there were Michelin stars for theater, it would get three.

REVIEW

The Oldest Living Cater Waiter

Presented by 42 Street Moon

Where: Gateway Theatre, 215 Jackson St., S.F.

When: 7 p.m. Sundays through Tuesdays; closes July 9

Tickets: \$20 to \$45

Contact: (415) 255-8207, www.42ndstmoon.org

3 Comments

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Marlene Perl

Just saw this show last night and your review is spot on. I loved every hilarious minute of it, and heartily recommend it to everyone who enjoys seeing a marvelous actor doing what he clearly loves to do.

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Pat Mahoney

Going on the 8th.

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Hugh Groman

I saw this and LOVED it.

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