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The Oldest Living Cater Waiter: My Life in Three Courses

Michael Patrick Gaffney

FringeReview

OUTSTANDING SHOW

Genre: Solo Show

Venue: PianoFight

Festival: San Francisco Fringe



Review

Michael Patrick Gaffney presents this original show about his life as an actor and how he became – and still is – a part-time cater waiter “in between acting jobs”.

Gaffney’s set is most elegant and a visual treat before he is even onstage. A rich looking carpet, a large round table covered with a red tablecloth is set for dinner with wine glasses. Five fine gold chairs surround the table, Broadway music plays in the background – and then Gaffney arrives to finesse the table settings wearing a uniform.

A minute later the oldest living cater waiter appears, creaky and off balance serving at the table. In a clownish way, Gaffney’s unkempt older version of himself – perhaps his vision of his life way in the future – takes the long way around the table to lay the plates and exits noisily.

Gaffney makes another very quick change and the mood changes, too. Elegance returns, with him in a black tailored tuxedo, he speaks poetry, pours wine – Chardonnay with



Michael Patrick Gaffney is “The Oldest Living Cater Waiter.”
Photo by DC Scarpelli.

your Sonnet – yes please! He speaks directly to the audience about his early life, family and his drama teacher in Oklahoma. Then about his arrival in California looking for acting work, how he became a waiter, a cater waiter – and got a break in his acting career!

Most actors rely on work that allows them freedom to change their schedule at short notice to go to auditions or rehearsals. Actors work in cafes for this reason and Gaffney is one such actor, except that instead of continuing to work in restaurants, his work takes place at high end catered events, where he does not need to take food or drink orders from the guests because the fine dining service is preplanned. Cater waiting and its specificity is new to me (and I suspect to a lot of the audience) and Gaffney takes us in to this world, charmingly explaining the intricacies of how to serve wine, place plates expertly and greet guests correctly – how to be the perfect cater waiter. It's fascinating!

The show, written by Gaffney and directed by Ken Sonkin, has three acts to it; each deals with a specific timeline in Gaffney's career. Through the clever use of large screen projections of ornate menus and photos Gaffney tells, shows and illustrates his bittersweet stories and anecdotes. For example, there's the unforgettable story about a person from his hometown who goes to Broadway. This story can only be told by Gaffney – to see his facial expressions, and to hear his own news happening at the same time. It's complicated!

Gaffney is a very compelling and charismatic performer, he plays himself revealing inner thoughts, embodies several different characters, and he also sings and does a couple of short dance numbers. He has performed in a lot of plays of all genres – serious to comedic and in between – in his career, so far, and this experience and his passion for theatre comes through in his well crafted and brilliantly performed show. He is natural, hilarious, honest, a superb actor and raconteur, vulnerable – very moving when performing serious dramatic speeches – yet he can also summon up full sarcasm mode with a delicious attitude! His acting, range of emotions, presence and fascinating personality are what makes Gaffney's show so rich and deep. He has a great story to tell and he is utterly watchable – leaving us, dare I say it...hungry for much more! Hopefully this show will come to a theatre near you very soon.

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