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Broadminded's 'Science & Surplus' Provides Clever Comedy

Theater Review

By Russ Bickerstaff



The smart, accessible sketch comedy group Broadminded takes quite a few chances with its latest show, *Science & Surplus*. The program from the all-female comedy troupe covers the history of life on Earth, creationism, "intelligent design" and more. The show's second act opens with a debate between science and religion (including Scientology) at a school board meeting in ancient Greece. Later on, there's a dialogue about nuclear technology in a domestic setting with Mother Russia and Father U.S. discussing responsibility with Iran and North Korea as teenage daughters.

Not everything in *Science & Surplus* is brilliant, but most of the material hits the mark. The best sketches work on multiple levels. Right before intermission, the group plays primates in a drug study in a sketch that manages to make statements about addiction, society's preoccupation with celebrities and reality television. Characters are played with an emotional depth that goes well beyond the jokes, but without compromising the humor. It's a sophisticated show that works as both intelligent satire and straightforward comedy.

All four members of Broadminded provide inspired moments. Megan McGee attempts to reason with a pet dog and a cell phone. Melissa Kingston plays the Earth lending sympathy to Anne Graff LaDisa as a demoted Pluto in some weird solar high school. Stacy Babl manages to make the idea of an ancient Greek Scientologist seem plausible. A therapy session between a man who speaks in particle physics and a woman who speaks in geology ends in sheer scientific poetry. It's approachable, offbeat comedy that lacks the desperation found in so much popular comedy.

Broadminded isn't afraid to end a sketch long after its punch line to reach for something more. The comedy feels that much more comfortable without the desperate parade of jokes begging for an audience's laughter.

Broadminded's *Science & Surplus* runs through June 12 at the Alchemist Theatre in Bay View.