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ARTS

Engaging new play, 'Feel the Spirit,' soars at Shotgun Players

In this inventive production, written by Noelle Viñas for Zoom, a young gay Latina pastor tries to hold her congregation together through the coronavirus and a racial uprising.

By Emily S. Mendel, April 5, 2021, 11:57 a.m.



Actors in Zoom play "Feel the Spirit" by Shotgun Players. Photo: Leanna Keyes

Shotgun Player's new Bridge Series begins with the creative and engaging world premiere, "Feel the Spirit." The inventive play was written by Noelle Viñas expressly for Zoom. It is astutely directed by Elizabeth Carter, and is shown live. "Feel the Spirit" follows a young gay Latina pastor, Gabriella (terrific Vero Maynez), trying to hold her congregation together during the early days of the lockdown through the aftermath of George Floyd's death.

Gabriella had been newly hired by a small non-denominational Christian church in early 2020, as the scourge of COVID-19 was first exposing its ugly reach and breadth. The congregation was forward-thinking enough to choose a gay woman pastor. Yet, as the intermission-less one-and-one-half-hour play continues, it appears that the elders of the church may not be in sync with Gabriella's strict adherence to COVID-19 health guidelines and her liberal political leanings.

Through the Zoom meetings among Gabby and two elders, Carleton (Fred Pitts), a Black dentist, and Angie, a single, middle-aged white woman whose social life revolves around the church, Gabriella learns that Carlton and Angie want to continue in-person services. However, Gabby, whose wife Rebecca (Lauren Andrei Garcia) is pregnant, is resolved not to expose her congregation, herself, and her wife to the virus. The two had to separate so that Rebecca could care for her ailing mother. The tender Zoom calls they share are a pale substitute for being together.

"Feel the Spirit" employs wonderfully creative use of Zoom in several respects. There are realistic portrayals of Zoom meetings like the ones we've all endured. The audience can use the chat function and breakout rooms during the live production. Three god-like spirits embody and speak for Gabriella's pure religious faith and convictions (Akaina Ghosh, Linda Maria Girón, J Riley, Jr.). Kudos to Transcend Streaming and Shotgun for the ethereal projections.

It is refreshing to experience a contemporary play that portrays religious faith with purity, conviction and honesty. When Vero Maynez, as Gabby, looks directly into the camera and smiles broadly and virtuously, it's compelling. We genuinely believe that she believes. It is a tribute to Vero Maynez's talent and the vision of Noelle Viñas, the playwright. She was part of Playwrights Foundation's four-year Resident Playwrights Initiative and a 2019 Artist-in-Residence at Djerassi.

During parts of the play, the audience is invited to speak and share via video, text, or in a breakout room. Participation is not mandatory, and patrons are welcome to opt-in or out of sharing their audio or video at any point.

Feel the Spirit runs through April 11. Reservations are required; tickets are on a pay-what-you-can basis, from \$8-\$40. Shotgun offers various subscription packages and passes for its 30th Anniversary Season and its four Bridge Series productions. More information can be found at www.shotgunplayers.org

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