

'Kitefliers' has an air about it

By MARTY CLEAR

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TAMPA - When Jobsite Theatre premiered *The March of the Kitefliers* a few years ago, the buzz in local theater circles centered around a neatly inventive plot twist that caused gasps of surprise to circulate through audiences.

For people who remember that production, the new Jobsite staging offers a different, subtler surprise.

That plot twist tends to eclipse the memory of the rest of the play. But on second viewing, with the shadow of that surprise gone, the strength of the play becomes more apparent. *Kitefliers* is funny and poignant, exploring a theme that is simultaneously personal and universal. The cast and the characters are likable, and Kari Goetz's direction is bright and lively.

The story revolves around Sam, an amiable, intellectual slacker who manages a corporate coffeehouse. He hates the job and doesn't seem to like the rest of his life, either. His only joy comes in puerile interactions with his longtime friend Jack.

But then Sam meets Julia, a well-grounded artist. As their relationship develops, Sam has to reconcile his adolescent world view with the realities of adulthood. It's familiar thematic territory, but playwrights Shawn Paonessa and Neil Gobioff make it interesting with how they allow Sam to negotiate with internal and external voices, and ultimately come to terms with adulthood.

Paonessa (who also plays Sam) and Gobioff have reworked the script, not drastically but most significantly improving the ending.

The script's only significant problem now is that, at almost 2 1/2 hours, it could stand some pruning. Several scenes disrupt the narrative rhythm and add nothing but length. A mimed dream sequence and a scene involving Jack after he and Sam have become estranged are out of character with the rest of the play.

But those problems are minor compared with the admirable ease with which Paonessa and Gobioff move their characters from drama to comedy.

The acting is as solid as the script. Paonessa adds a lot of charm to Sam but also lets us see how his childishness could grate on people. Meg Hemstead, as Julia, is bright, and together they create a couple the audience can cheer for. David Jenkins is appropriately brash as Jack.

At its heart, *Kitefliers* is a romantic comedy, but has enough wit and freshness, even on second viewing, to set it apart from the genre's run-of-the-mill entries.

If you go

The March of the Kitefliers

The play runs through April 15 at the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center's Shimberg Playhouse, 1010 MacInnes Place, Tampa. 8 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 4 p.m. Sunday. \$19.50, \$24.50. (813) 229-7827; www.tbpac.org.

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