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THEATER REVIEW



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In 'Food for Fish,' Chekhov's Heroines Pine for the Garden State

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By ANITA GATES Published: July 11, 2006

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Zak Szyszko

From left, Anna Hopkins, Luis Moreno and Ana Perea as three sisters.

Correction Appended

Adam Szymkowicz says that "Food for Fish," his fabulously weird and weirdly fabulous new comedy, is loosely inspired by Chekhov's "Three Sisters." His characters, who share a Manhattan apartment with a corpse in the living room, do long for another kind of life, just as Olga, Masha and Irina longed to move to Moscow. But these young women yearn for New Jersey.

"I of course enjoy New York like anyone would," the middle sister says dreamily. "The noise and the barrage of people. The subway smells. It is of course, as we all know, a good place to have a crush." Still, it can't compare to their childhood home in the Garden State.

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Barbara is the oldest daughter, a soft-spoken agoraphobic in a blond Breck-girl flip, tasteful sweater, long skirt and pearls. Barbara is played by Luis Moreno, a man. She is married to Dexter, a suit-and-tie kind of guy played by Katie Honaker, a woman.

The other sisters are played by women: Alice (Ana Perea) is a scientist who always takes blood and an additional DNA sample from her dates. The youngest daughter, Sylvia (Anna

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Hopkins), a journalist, is writing an article about lipstick but is determined to tackle serious topics, like the mysterious young man roaming Manhattan, kissing strangers.

The kisser is Bobbie, a man played by a man (Orion Taraban). He is also the play's narrator and eventually part of the sisters' lives. Bobbie — like the playwright, I suspect — finds adult life on this planet infuriating and faintly ridiculous.

Sex roles in particular. Gender-bending may be old hat, but when Barbara and Dexter (Mr. Moreno and Ms. Honaker, both cross-dressing) kiss, the audience has to stop for a second to consider whether anything daring is going on. And then re-examine the attitudes that prompted the question.

“Food for Fish,” skillfully directed by Alex Poledouris, is more complicated than Mr. Szymkowicz’s date comedy “Nerve,” which played at the 14th Street Y last month. It also has more to say. Only the ending is vaguely disappointing.

Until then, the reconsidered stereotypes and unexpected observations keep coming. Alice earnestly tells her older sister, “We leave too much unsaid.”

Barbara answers, “I like it that way.”

*“Food for Fish” continues through July 29 at the Kraine Theater, 85 East Fourth Street, East Village; (212) 352-3101.*

**Correction: July 13, 2006**

*A theater review on Tuesday about “Food for Fish,” at the Kraine Theater in the East Village, misstated the given name of the director. She is Alexis Poledouris, not Alex.*

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