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Posing as People... will love suffice in the distant future?

J.D. Whitney, Socal.com Theatre Editor

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"In New York, the writer is king," declared Orson Scott Card after the opening of *Posing as People*, the three one-acts based on short stories by the award-winning author. In Hollywood, Card laments, directors often become author stand-ins and eliminating the original author diminishes the material.

In this case Card, the science fiction author of over 1,000 short stories and 40 novels, including *Ender's Game* soon to be adapted for the screen by Warner Brothers, steps from author to director for three new playwrights, one of whom is his daughter. The result is a fascinating mixture of futurism and love stories centering on the inadequacy of the human heart to love well enough at the right time.

The blend reminds us that Card's work is quality literature first and good science fiction second. Though varied in setting, all three plays debate the opportunities we lose when love shows up in imperfect packages (age differences; the wrong situation; the wrong body). *Clap Hands and Sing*, adapted by Scott Brick, explores the mind of an elderly scientist who invented a time travel machine that hacks into the mind and body of a "host." He is, however, "an over-told story" whose depression over a too-young lost love is manipulated by his android, a narrator inserted by and played by the playwright.



Brick also plays the part of the young scientist returned, opposite Emily Janice Card's ingénue. Desire does not translate to circuitry (the lovers lack chemistry here), but Card's stories always twist toward a moral, and Brick offers a "gift" for us in the end.

Lifeloops, a tragic comedy adapted by Aaron Johnston, throws us into a reality-show-gone-mad future where the line between reality and "pseudo-reality" is non-existent. The satirical dialogue is so well paced and suited for soap opera/reality TV ("phony," "tart"), that we genuinely don't know when the cameras are rolling on a set, or when we are inside the real lives of the characters. Lara Schwarzberg deserves applause for her

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schizophrenic, emotional range. The transitions into the serious are a bit rough, yet Card and Johnston's crafting move us skillfully from hysterical comedy to a haunting warning about reality as entertainment.



The gem of the night, however, is "Sepulchre of Songs," adapted by Emily Janice Card. The story of a 16-year-old quadriplegic amputee and her therapist, Songs explores both the power and limitations of unconditional love. Emily Card is at her best here, both as a writer and actress. Her character, Elaine, is radiant--so much so, that her gradually "splitting" personality feels acceptable. Life on earth means facing womanhood in a terrible state, so Elaine is "pulled" into space by a goddess who sings Christ-like songs from the place where Elaine can be whole. Kirby Heyborne (Everwood, "Saints and Soldiers") plays her young therapist, who struggles with his own limitations ("If I were God, I'd make some changes"). Heyborne transforms the relationship between Elaine and her therapist into the best part of the evening. His characterization is so crafted that we understand his offering his "promise" to her, even though she is a patient. Although a part of her must remain in space, her perseverance helps him find joy in what he cannot change. Compassion is always a theme in Orson Scott Card's work, but Emily Janice Card makes it clear that sometimes in love, hearing a voice say "I'm right here," is enough.

Posing as People is playing every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights at the Whitefire Theatre, 13500 Ventura Blvd., Sherman Oaks, through October 16th. Curtain is at 8 p.m. For tickets, go to www.tix.com or call 1-800-595-4tix.

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