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Although some standouts, `Women on the Verge' misses the mark

By Sophie Braccini



Marah Sotelo as Candela in the musical "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" Photo Jay Yamada

over town, while Ivan's wife, Lucia is also looking for him to sew him to get back the lost years. In the meantime, Pepa's friend Candela finds herself entangled in a passionate romance with a very dangerous person, and she tries to reach her friend with mounting desperation. It is a story of passion, with multiple funny twists. Everyone is hot-tempered and borders hysteria at times. In the original movie that was nominated for the 1988 Oscars, the talent of director Almadovar and his Spanish actors made it a deliciously deranged comedy.

The adaptation as a musical was created in 2010 on Broadway, and according to Wikidepia had mixed reviews and closed in January 2011 after 30 previews and 69 performances.

Is that play too ambitious for the local theater? Town Hall Theatre has not hesitated in the past to present very powerful production such as Margaret Edson's "Wit" or Tony Kushner's "Angels in America," and did it with mastery. Missing the mark here unfortunately comes from some being miscast. Not everybody is capable of channeling the latent extravagance necessary for this play to work. The only actress who is believable as "on the verge of a nervous breakdown" is Marah Sotelo as Pepa's friend Candela. The best scene of the play is when she tries desperately to reach her friend on the phone; all is there, the energy, the presence, the over the top passion, and the humor. One would wish that other actors would have followed that lead and played at that level rather than the diligent and proper acting delivered.

The main male character, the womanizer Ivan, is played by Paul Plain, topped with the most strange orange mane. Is that an allusion to the current White House's tenant? It is hard to comprehend how all the women in the play fall over themselves for him. Sheila Viramonte as Lucia and Debbie Lynn Carriger, as Lucia's lawyer, have some good moments, though it is hard to really believe in their characters.

Martin Flynn's scenic design is clever and makes the best use of the relatively limited space on stage, with special mention for the rendition of a full-throttle chase in the streets of Madrid. The music by David Yasbek is very rhythmic and energizing, carried on stage by a talented group of musicians.

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