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# Blueberry Pond's 'Hong Kong' a quick, uneven story of love

PETER D. KRAMER  
 The Journal News

dreaming while in therapy or sitting in the park.

In Lloyd Pace's "Hong Kong," having its premiere at Ossining's Blueberry Pond Theatre Ensemble through Dec. 2, Philip Bradley is a white corporate attorney assigned to Hong Kong — a "foreign devil," as the natives call them.

He's surrounded by sharks, and not just the ones in the bay near his home.

There's his manipulative wife, Anne, played by Elena Zazanis, who tells Philip that if he loses his job in Hong Kong — which is all but a certainty — he'll lose her, too.

There's Michael Kim, her lover, played by Dinh Q. Doan, who carries on his seduction under Philip's nose.

And there's Will Lehman (Michael C. O'Day), an up-and-coming partner in Philip's firm, who wears his ambition like a badge of honor and will go to any length to get what he wants.

For his part, Philip, played by Nick Raio, is a sad sack, a man who is acted upon and doesn't act. He's Charlie Brown, convinced that the football will always be pulled out at the last minute. And he seems to be OK with that.

At least Charlie Brown had Lucy as a psychiatrist. Philip's therapist doesn't even speak the same language.

Is it any wonder he'd rather spend his days in the park, where he meets Will's wife, Patty, played by Catherine Nastasi?

Patty, stuck in an equally dysfunctional marriage, is seduced by her new surroundings.

"Hong Kong" has a lot to say about love, loss and ambition, and it says it all in rapid-fire fashion.

Pace's characters ping-pong lines back and forth, scarcely waiting for them to land before moving on to the next thought. People don't listen to each other much in "Hong Kong." They're too consumed by the pursuit of their own happiness, even if it comes at the expense of others.

Pace has structured "Hong Kong" cinematically, with what seem like dozens of quick scenes, each preceded by the sound of a gong. As the evening goes on, the fast-paced chatter and the repeated gongs become a swirl of sound and dialogue that makes one wonder if this isn't all something Philip is

There is a film-noir quality to their speech, a certainty to these characters that makes it possible for them to declare "Good people don't make it" and "It's never a sin to love" without an ounce of irony.

Having established that tone, director Forest Hamilton, the new artistic director at Blueberry Pond, has Judy W. Chen pull the show in a different direction.

It is Chen who bangs the gong and Chen who embodies several mostly comic characters: She's the bubbly cocktail waitress, a karaoke-singing bar patron, the bullying boss with a piggish snout and a cowboy hat, a stewardess, a DMV clerk, and one of the girls used as a pawn in a game of seduction Anne plays with Michael.

Since she's the person responsible for setting the scene, it twice falls to Chen to parade a toy plane across the stage to let the audience

know that the action has moved to an air-plane. It gets laughs and breaks the tension — and Chen, to her credit, is fully committed to everything she does and every character she plays — but it seems at odds with the rest of the show.

Later, Raio joins in on the frivolity, blurring the line even further.

The menace that hangs over the proceedings — you must keep your eyes open, with all the sharks — carries the day and Pace gives things a refreshing twist while resisting the urge to tie up all loose ends.

The production values at Blueberry Pond — in a 49-seat theater on Cedar Pond — are uneven.

The single set, designed by Halie Flanagan Wolfe, is an effectively utilitarian mix of platforms and boxes, with a touch of Asian red. Melanie Smock's lighting creates several playing areas to make the most of the tiny stage.

Sound designer Greg H. Hennigan's effects are well-chosen but mistimed on occasion. A scene at the beach was well under way when we began to hear the waves.

Love it or not, Blueberry Pond audiences are the first to see this brand-new play.

And there's something to be said for that.

Reach Peter D. Kramer at [pkramer@lohud.com](mailto:pkramer@lohud.com) or 914-694-5118. Read his "In the Wings" blog at [www.theater.lohudblogs.com](http://www.theater.lohudblogs.com)

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