



The Behavior of Broadus

Reviewed by Lovell Estell III

Sacred Fools Theater

Through Oct. 18

RECOMMENDED:

The name Dr. Watson is most commonly associated with Sherlock Holmes's affable sidekick, but in this delightfully twisted musical, co-directors Matt Almos and Ken Roht and the always edgy Burglars of Hamm and Sacred Fools Theater Company introduce us to another Dr. Watson – John Broadus -- who was the father of behaviorism and a fellow you damn sure wouldn't want your children around.

Matt Almos, Carolyn Almos, Jon Beauregard and Albert Dayan's book is laugh-loaded, and covers the Watson's life (1878-1958) from his inauspicious beginnings in rural South Carolina into and beyond his days at Johns Hopkins University, where his rabid obsession with controlling human behavior and creepy experiments with lab rats — and even a baby human lab rat famously named Little Albert (Amir Levi) — would catapult him into fame and fortune in the recondite world of behavioral psychology (before Dr. Spock came along).

Act 1 is a near non-stop knee slapper; Act 2 is less so, and drags on too long. It traverses events in which the good Dr. plunges into the heady world of advertising after being kicked out of academia for a

torrid, well-publicized affair with his lab assistant (Devin Sidell), and where he eventually confronts the specters of his victims (mostly abused animals).

The show is still a hoot. The book slyly references pop culture, skewers psychological and scientific hauteur, and takes a swipe at the unending American obsession with product.

Hugo Armstrong is terrific as Watson, wearing the hats of lovable rube, scientist with a God-complex, fear-inducing ad exec and doddering old fool with equal aplomb. He is backed by a terrific ensemble, whose singing and dancing are the show's comic marrow (Roht's choreography is razor sharp), complemented by Matt Almos and Brendan Milburn's mélange of relentlessly funny songs.

Tifanie McQueen's low-key scenic design proves remarkably effective. Ann Closs-Farley weighs in with a fetching array of costumes and masks, while Brandon Baruch evokes subtlety and whimsy with the lighting schema. Musical Director John Ballinger is part of a five-piece band that doesn't miss a note.

Sacred Fools Theater, 660 N. Heliotrope Dr., Hlwyd.; Fri.-Sat., 8 pm., Sun., 3 pm., through Oct. 18. (310) 281-8337, sacredfools.org