



## 'Fat Pig' weighs in on body-consciousness in a new way

Photograph by Jeanine Brown Photography  
Actors (from left) Eric Rice, Noel Wood and  
Laura Jane Bailey star in City Lights' California  
premiere of 'Fat Pig.'

By Heather Zimmerman

Whether we're eyeing shrinking or expanding celebrity waistlines, contemplating the obesity epidemic or lamenting "heroin-chic" models, *someone's* weight is on everyone's mind these days.

So just whose business is it, anyway, what a total stranger weighs? Neil LaBute's play *Fat Pig* has a few thoughts. City Lights Theater Company presents the California premiere of *Fat Pig*, which runs through Feb. 25 at City Lights, 529 S. Second St., San Jose.

The play tells of a budding romance between the trim Tom and the plus-sized Helen, both successful professionals living in an unspecified city. Their relationship is going great, except that Tom's friends relentlessly assert that the couple is mismatched.

City Lights' former artistic director, Tom Gough, directs *Fat Pig*. Lisa Mallette, the company's current executive artistic director, approached Gough about directing the play, and he says from his first reading of the script, he was hooked. "Lisa gave it to me about a year ago," Gough says. "I read it on a flight from San Jose to Ontario. When the plane landed, the flight attendants had to shoo me off the plane because I hadn't finished reading it. I basically went and sat at the gate for the next 10 minutes so I could finish it. I was enthralled by it. I just thought it was a terrifically, economically written script with a lot of punch to it."

In the play, Helen and Tom meet in the manner of many a romantic comedy: They share a table during lunch at a crowded restaurant and after a few awkward exchanges, they hit it off. Usually, after boy meets girl, friends are regaled with details about the new love interest. Tom, however, initially evades the subject with his friends at the office, Carter and Jeannie, suspecting they will ridicule Helen's weight--and him for dating her. "I see this play as an instrument of at least provocation, if not change, through the sort of negative example it sets with the characters of Carter and Jeannie," Gough says. "Maybe we don't know people specifically who are that bold in their dialogue, but I think if most people really thought about it, they'd be able to think of a few."

Carter is indeed brutal in his opinions about appearances, and Jeannie seems to have the market cornered on nasty, judgmental remarks. But ironically, although what Carter has to say is usually ugly, he's also the most self-aware of any of the characters. "One of the most profound lines of the play is one of Carter's," Gough says. "It's just kind of tossed off. He just says, 'Yeah, whatever. Truth.'"

To some extent, LaBute is known for creating cynical characters like Carter, and especially for exploring aspects of social interaction that aren't easy to face. One of LaBute's most famous--or infamous--works is *In the Company of Men*, the 1997 film that he wrote and directed. The movie tells of two businessmen who make a game of trying to break the heart of a female co-worker who strikes them as especially vulnerable. The film was well-received by critics for offering social criticism beyond simply denouncing the businessmen's despicable plot.

"I think that this writer is really one of the most bold and confrontational forces that's emerged in the past 10 years," Gough says. "*In the Company of Men*--I've never wanted to throw things at my television as much as when I saw this movie. But he's got a real knack for brutal, visceral dialogue that sounds real and has a lot of humor in it."

*Fat Pig* does have its share of humorous dialogue, and an equal amount of serious, insightful conversations, which makes the play difficult to categorize as flat-out comedy or drama. "It's really one of those shows that will take on a different identity based on how each individual audience receives it," Gough says.

City Lights audiences so far have reacted differently to the play's humor and its harsher lines as well, a phenomenon that Gough says is fun to observe. But however audiences respond to the comedy and drama of *Fat Pig*, the play's examination of image-consciousness is clear enough, and that's something Gough has tried to highlight.

Everyone has probably had instances of thoughtlessly passing judgment, he points out. "You might look at a couple, not just based on size, but for whatever reason, and think, 'What do they see in each other?' But, ultimately, if they're happy, who cares? That's the message that I want to get out to the world is: 'why would you care, if somebody else is happy?'"

Tickets are \$20-\$35. For more information, call 408.295.4200 or visit [www.cltc.org](http://www.cltc.org).