

Collision Course

In San Jose Rep's 'Splitting Infinity,' science and faith collide

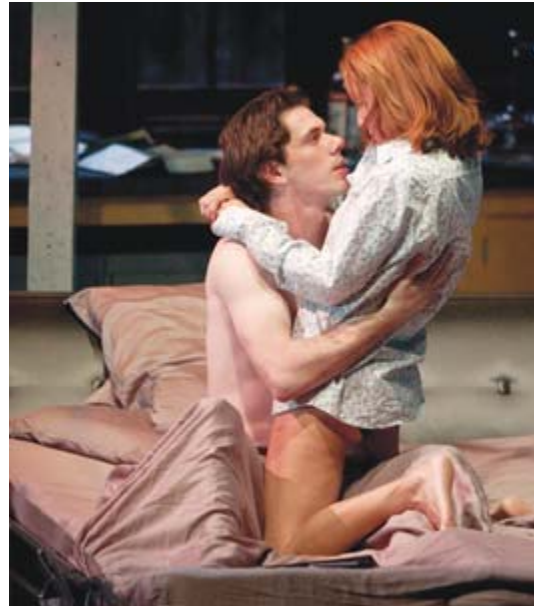
By Matthew Craggs

LIKE AN EPIC "Will they, won't they?" romance, science and religion continually skirt the edge of flirtation. The unlikely pairing has more in common than either side would like to admit. While science has faith in answers it may never be able to confirm, religion knows the answers without a need for confirmation. The intersection of these equally flawed approaches to life's big questions is the center of discussion in San Jose Repertory Theatre's new production, *Splitting Infinity*. From the moment you enter the theater, the set tells you that this production is going to aim for the stars.

Making incredible use of the vertical expanse of the theater, the two-story set places the interior of a telescope above a university office. Whether intentional or not, scenic designer Robin Sanford Roberts uses the hanging lights and parterre to create a subtle extension of the telescope.

Unfortunately, as the show opens, the beautifully constructed exoskeleton of the telescope hinders the line of sight, and a metal pole obscures a majority of Christine Sage Behrens' lines during the opening scene. Behrens, who plays lead character Leigh Sangold 27 years in the past, doesn't help the situation by opening the show with a weak delivery. It is obvious that Behrens has the talent and the ability necessary to command the role, but her confidence is lacking. On the other side of the coin, Amy Resnick, who plays the scientist in the present day, exudes both the confidence and the talent needed to control a character that has more kinetic energy than the stars she looks to for answers. A Nobel Prize-winning astrophysicist, Sangold is as stubborn in her scientific beliefs as her childhood friend Saul Lieberman (Robert Yacko, with Kevin Dedes as young Saul) is in his devotion to Judaism. As a rabbi, Lieberman embodies the faith of religion while Sangold holds the knowledge of science. Lieberman's love for Sangold, and her attempt to use science to disprove the existence of God, provide a great back and forth that tests their relationship.

Playwright Jamie Pachino achieves a balance by respecting both sides of the argument; however, a lot of credit is also due to the director, Kirsten Brandt. With two hot-headed



Photograph by Bob Shomler

SUPERHEATED: Physicist Leigh (Amy Resnick) and young Robbie (Chad Deverman) ignite some passionate atoms in 'Splitting Infinity.'

intellectuals in two time periods, Brandt also has to reign in a Christian Science mother (Cindy Goldfield) who is unaware of the effects her faith has had on her son, Robbie March (Chad Deverman). Goldfield's restrained execution of her role brings compassion to a character that is hard to sympathize with in many ways. Yet, it's Robbie March who is the most intriguing because of his dichotomy. His youth and energy that feeds Sangold is wrought from a place of death and inaction; at the same time, the backlash to his religious upbringing landed him in science's and Sangold's bed.

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What this production succeeds in showing us is that it's possible neither side has it right, yet both may be correct. As the present-day Lieberman points out, "The information we have is not enough. Have you ever tried to split infinity?" Charged with the task of metaphorically splitting infinity—taking their most unquantifiable truth and breaking it down to something we can grasp—this production holds religion and science responsible for their beliefs, showing it's not the answer that's important, it's the questions we ask.

SPLITTING INFINITY, a San Jose Repertory Theatre production, plays Tuesday at 7:30pm, Wednesday–Saturday at 8pm, Saturday at 3pm and Sunday at 2pm through Nov. 9 at the Rep, 101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose. Tickets are \$16–\$61. (408.367.7255)