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Bas Bleu show aims to offend

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Nipple clips: \$23; Ball gag: \$30; Being able to take an "educational" field trip with your director to Doctor John's to purchase nipple clips and a ball gag: priceless



Sandi Klug thought she'd seen it all, and then she took on the role of directing Bas Bleu Theatre's new play, "Dirty Story."

But during a production meeting to discuss necessary props, Klug learned that the office supplies she suggested wouldn't suffice for the nipple clips called for in the script, and was taken to the "adult-interests" store to see exactly what she was dealing with.

"If you can't learn and grow through this experience then you're not doing it right," she laughed with a shrug.

Besides, the sadomasochistic visual elements in "Dirty Story" are far less shocking than the verbal banter, Klug said. Playwright John Patrick Shanley ("Moonstruck" and "Doubt") has put together a dirty little tale of sex, politics and oil - a battle of the sexes gone global.

Wanda and Brutus are fighting over their shared apartment - a take on the Israeli/Palestinian battle in the Middle East.

And what dirty political tale would be complete without the United States - which comes in the form of Frank, Wanda's pistol-toting, cowboy ex-boyfriend. Add Watson, a Tony Blair-esque moderator, and you have the whole convoluted, political mess required to make such a decidedly un-PC, but ripe-for-ridicule comedy.

The political quagmire that is the Middle East is a subject very few people would even think of writing about - especially as a comedy, Klug said.

"But it's written in a very honest, excruciatingly funny way," she added. "And it offends everybody. Nothing is sacred."

Everybody is right and horribly wrong in this play, said Heather Lawrence, who plays Wanda.

"(Wanda's) journey really is very much like in life," Lawrence said. "She starts out so naïve and then she has such a profound journey that turns her from an idealist to a gun-wielding, I don't know what you would call her."

While preparing for the role, Lawrence read up on as much of the politics behind the conflict as she could, finding her own beliefs changing, rechanging and then changing back again.

"It is great to do another play where I learned and that made me rethink a lot of my own preconceptions," she said referencing her role as neo-punk conspiracy theorist in "A Bright Room Called Day."





"The one thing I came to is that people take sides; it's our nature," Lawrence said.

"We have a villain and a victim," Klug said. "Unfortunately, in this play there is also a question of whether there is a hero."

Because despite the toy pistol and the white cowboy hat his character, Frank, wears, actor Kurt Brighton knows there are no clear definitions in "Dirty Story."

"There's no good guy," said Brighton, as he twirled a plastic six-shooter. "It brings up the question: 'Can the victim also be the villain?' And the other way around... It lays bare all the mistakes that have been made."

Playing a character whose beliefs veer sharply from your own is tough but the actors must believe in what they are saying.

"What makes it interesting as an actor is that I have to see my side as right," said Duane Sawyer, who plays Watson.

Sawyer called his character the epitome of the old Western civilization.

"He's very, 'We used to run the world and now we don't but we still know best,'" he said with a haughty accent.

The goal is to make the audience sympathize with you at least a little bit, Lawrence added. Otherwise no one wants to see you there.

"I've played terrible people and you have to find a place where you see that they feel they are right. No one believes that they are evil. Even Hitler believed he was right."

Even though his own political viewpoints are far from his over-the-top American hero character, Brighton also had to think differently for his role.

"Frank has a childlike hopefulness," he said of his "dimly optimistic character. "He has a very simple world view in that everything he does is the right thing to do... He believes in 'strength,' 'freedom' and 'America' and all these one-word phrases that we are supposed to know what they mean but don't really mean much in and of themselves."



And with all of that, the cast still wants to remind audiences that this is a comedy.

"It's a grim as hell subject matter but it's also funny as hell," Brighton said.

"What it comes down to is that we all just want to be recognized as having value," Klug added. Well, that and the occasional ball gag and some nipple clips.