

August 16, 2018 at 2:12 pm EDT | by Brock Thompson

Fuchs' 'In the Closet' is not to be missed

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(Image courtesy of the Rainbow Theatre Project)

No one really asks it anymore. Well, not of me anyway, I've been out for more than 20 years. It used to be fairly ubiquitous though. When did you come out? To which I reply, which time? To myself? To co-workers? To friends? For many of us, coming out, and even going back in, is a never-ending process. Oh, to be able to go back and speak to my 18-year-old self, the kid twisting himself in knots over how to do it.

This week, the Rainbow Theatre Project opens its sixth season with the premiere of local writer Sigmund Fuchs' new play, "In the Closet." In two acts, we meet four men, all at different stages of gay existence — a young man, a middle-aged man, an old man, and then lastly, the youngest of all, John. As the foundation is laid, we hear the usual insults levied across the generations — the young man is 'selfish' and 'lazy,' the older men are 'bitter old queens.' They all meet back in the closet where they've all run to at their different ages, for different reasons. John runs back in, panicking after his first same-sex sexual experience. The oldest man is back in and coming to grips with the very real problem of LGBT seniors having to re-enter the closet as they seek nursing home care at facilities not equipped to deal with their needs.

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From there, the second act explodes, and without revealing too much, each character is forced to confront the trauma that places them back within the confines, or comfort, of the closet. Dialogue becomes honest and real, and gay milestones are hit upon, everything from reconciling faith and sexuality, to the first time you dared to enter a gay bar, to realizing you're no longer young in a community that places a premium on youth.

Coming out stories are a bit tired at this point, but Fuchs turns it all on its head. And you have to ask yourself — have you ever run back into the closet? Just maybe tiptoed back in for a quick second? Maybe in the back of an Uber and decided to 'straighten up' your conversation? Or maybe walking down an unfamiliar street and you decide to butch up your walk for a bit? The boundaries of the closet are highly permeable, and mostly it's thought of as a place of shame and self-doubt. But on top of all that, Fuchs' play has us wondering if there are any redeeming qualities to the closet? Can it be a safe space; a space for regrouping, reconciliation, and healing? Beyond the pitfalls and problems with the closet, the play tackles the very real problems gay men face, including self-acceptance, aging, loss and self-loathing.

It's often strange to see a play without a real main character, no one to rally behind or champion their on-stage growth or journey. But each of the four men commands your attention from beginning to end. Special recognition, however, goes to actors Zachary Dittami and Christopher Janson, both who portray their characters at their lowest points, lives fraught with trauma, giving us this but also exuding warmth and empathy in their tender exchanges. The audience is likely to see their own stories among theirs — memory can be a powerful thing like that.

"In the Closet" runs from Aug. 16-Sept. 15 at the District of Columbia Arts Center, 2438 18th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. For tickets, visit rainbowtheatreproject.org.

Brock Thompson is a D.C.-based writer. He contributes regularly to the Blade.

CHRISTOPHER JANSON COMING OUT GAY BAR IN THE CLOSET RAINBOW THEATRE PROJECT
SIGMUND FUCHS ZACHARY DITTAMI

Brock Thompson

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