

REVIEW: RIVERSIDE AUDIENCE LOVES 'MEGAN GOGERTY' TOO

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By Loren Keller, CorridorBuzz.com

Every few years the national spotlight turns to Iowa and the continuing wave of presidential candidates who campaign throughout the state for months on end. With enough determination and patience, anyone who lives here might have the chance to meet any of those candidates in person, if only for a few seconds.

But what does saying hello to a famous politician really mean, besides a potential vote in their favor? Can anything of substance really be communicated or derived from such a brief exchange? Where does that brush with fame leave the person who encounters it? In 2003, playwright Megan Gogerty found herself “staring into the most heavily moisturized face of American feminism” when she met Hillary Clinton at a book signing in Austin, Texas.

Gogerty had agonized over preparations for the encounter with the object of her political affections, trying to think of the perfect thing to say. What she actually blurted out upon meeting the former first lady won't be spoiled here, but suffice to say Gogerty didn't make quite the impression she had hoped to.

It was that brief meeting that inspired Gogerty write a monologue for Riverside Theatre's annual “Walking the Wire” festival, which morphed into her first full-length solo show in a decade.

The Friday night premiere of “Megan Gogerty Loves You Very Much” was an often-funny crowd pleaser, even if the subject of pre-election politics seemed a little timeworn. But the political back story of the past few years was necessary for Gogerty to tell her own. In “Loves You,” Gogerty weaves a trio of storylines about personal change during that period: of place (she moved from Los Angeles to Iowa), of body (pregnancy and motherhood) and of mind (she's a Hillary fan who switches her allegiance to Barack Obama.)

While her riffs on a dead hamster from childhood and her later interest in adopting a chinchilla and a beta fish weren't as gripping or funny, much of what followed in the second half of the play was.

Gogerty connected better with her wry observations about modern geopolitics (which, like high school, "boil down to status, power and money") and the reactions she draws when she breaches Iowa City Farmers Market etiquette: "We talk in a quiet semaphore. We assume no one would intentionally make a jackass out of themselves."

As a performer, Gogerty moved fluidly about the minimally appointed stage, sometimes dancing and other times lying down as her story of politics and pregnancy unfolded. As her early support of Hillary Clinton fades ("she should have run in 2004 when I asked her to") and she slowly comes to embrace Obama at the Iowa caucus, so too does she come to connect with her infant son born a couple weeks later.

The final moments of the play proved the most poignant, as Gogerty describes the smile of her infant son that finally secures the bond between mother and child.

"I love him because he's mine," she says. "I love America for the exact same reason."