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'Married Alive!' at Actors' Playhouse in Gables a burst of summer fun

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The adventures (and misadventures) that follow "I do" are the fodder for *Married Alive!*, the frothy yet sporadically pithy summer show that has just opened at Actors' Playhouse.

More than a revue but a little less than a full-fledged musical, the show originally had the phrase "from Niagara to Viagra" in its title. That reveals a lot about its tone -- cheeky -- and about its two focal couples.

Erin (Julie Kleiner) and Paul (Jason Parrish) are two crazy-in-love kids just taking their vows, getting ready to build careers and, maybe one day, have a family. Diane (Marcia McClain) and her therapist-hubby Ron (Gary Marachek) have been married forever, and though they're content, they face the predictable challenges of keeping a long relationship interesting as they age.

Book writer/lyricist Sean Grennan and composer Leah Okimoto don't dig for great dramatic insights in *Married Alive!*, and that's as it should be. For a fun-seeking audience (which is 100 percent this show's demographic), the occasional resonant tug at the heartstrings is just fine.

Director David Arisco's smart casting choices have made the qualitative difference between pleasant summer entertainment and a production that delivers all the laughs and poignant moments its creators dreamed up.

Singing on Actors' upstairs Balcony Theatre stage, Marachek, Kleiner and Parrish have voices that could probably be heard in the downstairs theater -- without amplification.

McClain's vocal instrument is a little more delicate, but just right for touching numbers like *It Isn't Important* and *We Haven't Come So Far*, her lovely looking-back duet with Marachek.

The show rolls from one funny bit to the next: McClain dressed as a naughty schoolgirl (in a particularly hot costume by Ellis Tillman), Marachek as Zorro, the better to spice up their bedroom interaction; Marachek lecturing on teen offspring, then leading a hip-hop deconstruction of the horrors that await their parents; all four actors in the Christmas visit from hell.

That last one is comedy gold. Marachek and McClain abandon the Ron/Diane characters to play Erin's parents. Daddy's a growling lush who has never liked Paul.

Mama's a walking Christmas card whose fondest wish is that Erin and her twin sis Margie will again wear the hideous matching sweaters she made them. Margie, by the way, has always had the hots for Paul, so when Kleiner is playing the "bad" twin, she gets all inappropriately freaky with the brother-in-law.

Married Alive! is staged simply as if it were taking place in a much-used party hall with a turntable whirling one scene off and the next one on.

David Nagy, the musical director, is perched above the action, so when one particular piece of Gene Seyffer's scenery comes gliding out, Nagy looks like a pianist atop a wedding cake.

Married Alive! aims at nothing more or less than providing a burst of summer fun. And thanks to Arisco's well-chosen cast, it delivers.

Christine Dolen is The Miami Herald's theater critic.

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