

# Live Arts cleans 'House' with laughter

By CLARE AUROFFER

clark7h@comcast.net

It's likely true that everyone wants order in their lives. It's equally true that what is defined as order is as different as individuals are.

Sarah Rule's play "The Clean House," now running at Live Arts, deals with all sorts of order and disorder, and ultimately about a sort of control. But before that, and most importantly, it deals with laughter.

Rule is a relatively new playwright with strong credentials. "The Clean House," her sixth play, was a runner-up for the Pulitzer Prize for drama.

The play is noteworthy for several reasons, not the least among them that it features four strong female characters, three of them older than 50, and deals with issues ranging from jokes and soul mates to death.

But beyond any great points the play may make, it is first a comedy. And at that, this production, directed by Amanda McRaven, succeeds mightily. This is a production that will make you laugh first, and give you things to think about well after the last act.

The story is of two sisters — one a doctor with a Brazilian maid who loves jokes but hates housekeeping, the other a sort of sad-sack housewife who loves to clean.



Kay Leigh Ferguson and Bill LeSueur star in "The Clean House" at Live Arts. Wednesday night is on a "pay what you can" basis.

Added to the mix is the doctor's husband and his newly found soul mate, a 64-year-old breast cancer patient, who ultimately works with the other three women to control nothing less than her own death. In one way or another, each of the characters fills a void in some other.

Christeanne Queiroz may be new to Live Arts but clearly is not new to talent. She handles the part of Mathilde, the maid, with absolute believability and manages to get across all of the charac-

ter's quirks, both in English and Portuguese. Don't worry — you don't really need to understand Portuguese, though it might be interesting to. Queiroz gets her points across, and so does the playwright. Humor is a universal language.

Real-life sisters Susan and Cynthia Burke handle the parts of the doctor and housewife, respectively.

Susan Burke is exceptional as Lane, the doctor, whose professional and emotional life is ordered — or so she

## THEATRE REVIEW

### "The Clean House"

Live Arts

To be presented at 8 p.m.

Wednesday, 7:30 p.m.

Thursday 8 p.m. Friday and

Saturday runs through Oct.

13.

\$22.50, \$20.50 for mem-

bers, on Friday and

Saturday, \$19.50, \$17.50 for

members, on Sunday and

Thursday nights, \$10 gen-

eral balcony seating.

Weekdays are "pay what

you can."

[www.livearts.org](http://www.livearts.org)

977-4177

thinks — while she relies on her maid to keep the house that way. Since the maid hates cleaning, when Lane's sister, Virginia, offers to secretly do the cleaning while Mathilde works on making up jokes, disorder rises out of Lane's apparently ordered life.

Cynthia Burke is always funny, and this performance is no exception. There were times on opening night when she didn't seem to completely inhabit the character making her occasionally seem two-dimensional, but that may be a deliberate directing choice or just opening-night nerves and could smooth out over time.

Kay Leigh Ferguson and Bill LeSueur round out the cast, in the first act as fantasy figures and in the second as the husband and his mistress. Both are exceptional in their roles, with Ferguson taking on a strength that ultimately pulls the four women together.

This show gives a director a lot of balls to juggle, keeping humor and entertainment in the air while tossing in food for thought. McRaven has done a fine job directing this play, and clearly also has worked well with her designers. Krista Franco has designed a clean, elegant and creative set, well complemented by Robert Benjamin's subtle but effective lights and Ricca Emlet's costumes.

Andrew Herringer's music is subtle but exceptional, almost a character in its own right.

If you've never thought you'd like to buy the soundtrack from a Live Arts play — especially a non-musical — you may change your mind.

This is a funny play, with a great deal going on. But you don't need to become obsessed with the deeper themes. Either they will speak to you, or they won't, and in any case the dramaturgs and director's notes in the program tell you all you need to know.

If you go to this one, go to laugh. The rest will follow.