

Bombshells! is a welcome addition to the girl-power genre



Alberto Romeu

'BOMBHELLS!' POWER: Pilar Uribe, Margot Moreland, Laura Hodos, Laura Turnbull, Melissa Minyard, and Patti Gardner address many an issue in the world premiere musical.

BY CHRISTINE DOLEN

First, a confession, the kind of truth-telling that the Miami Bombshells concept is all about.

Shows like *Menopause The Musical*, *Girls' Night: The Musical* and *Respect: A Musical Journey of Women* aren't close to the top of my must-see theater list. Sure, I recognize the common joys and angst they reflect, and the calculated catharsis such musicals provide.

Me, I like a little more heft to my theatrical experience. So I went into the world premiere of *Bombshells! A Musical Explosion of Life, Love and Telling It All!* at Actors' Playhouse with hope and managed expectations, both part of a critic's tool kit. Yet I was pleasantly surprised.

Don't get me wrong. *Bombshells!* is unlikely to be the next Broadway smash, and it can use further tweaking and tightening. But composer-lyricist-playwright Jeanette Hopkins has created one of the better examples of the let's-hear-it-for-the-girls musical genre, and in the show's first-ever production, Actors' Playhouse has served the piece well.

Beyond Hopkins' tuneful score, with lyrics that range from clever to clunky, her distillation of the nonfiction book that inspired the show -- 2005's *Dish & Tell: Life, Love and Secrets* by six accomplished women friends known as the Miami Bombshells -- gives each of the half-dozen gals time in the spotlight as they explore what could have been an exhaustive list of contemporary women's issues. The gals sing, laugh and squabble about men, multitasking, nannies,

stress, careers, sex toys (consider that a parental advisory), health, teen offspring, aging parents, plastic surgery, diets -- well, I could go on, and *Bombshells!* does.

But thanks to Hopkins, director David Arisco and a cast of six women who are as accomplished in musical theater as their real-life counterparts are in their own fields, *Bombshells!* spends a couple of hours moving through that checklist with a mostly light touch.

As Pat, the woman who insists the stress-relieving circle of friends is a good thing, Melissa Minyard sings gorgeously and brings a spirited spirituality to the piece. Margot Moreland's zaftig Tammi is both bubbly and lusty, and her lament *Can't Get You Out of My Heart* is one of the show's musical highlights. Patti Gardner's elegant Mercedes, Laura Turnbull's sharp-tongued Sara, Laura Hodos' nurturing Annie and Pilar Uribe's sleek Lydia winningly complete the disparate yet bonded circle.

This first go at *Bombshells!* benefits enormously from Artie Butler's terrific arrangements, Dave Campbell's clever choreography, David Nagy's musical direction and Darío Almirón's chic costumes.

The path of this ode to the power of wine, chocolate and truth-telling friendships is likely to be similar to the one followed by *Menopause The Musical* and its ilk. But that's OK. Nothing wrong with widespread, enduring success.