



## First Love

By Charles Mee; Directed by Kim Weild

Off Broadway, Play Revival

Runs through 7.8.18

Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce Street

By Ran Xia

**BOTTOM LINE:** An exquisitely constructed, deeply moving tale of two people in their 70s finding love for the first time, filtered through the lens of Magritte.

In all of Charles Mee's plays, there's a profound kindness, along with an effortless sort of whimsy stemming from a thorough understanding of humanity. This is most pronounced in *First Love*, a boy-meets-girl story in the world of Magritte—except the boy, and the girl, are both in their 70s.

Edward Pierce's vibrant set demands to be noticed: the leaf that is a tree, the window that's a piece of the strikingly blue sky. We're both indoors and outdoors, that's for sure; a young woman (Taylor Harvey) steps into vision wearing that famous bowler hat, holding the pipe that's not a pipe—she's to become a facilitator in the love story that's about to unfold in this surrealist's dreamland, one full of perfect motifs where "everything we see hides another thing." Indeed when our lovers take their initial entrance, they look out of place, draped with in-between colors like two canvases that have been painted over—the opposite of their newfound surroundings. And yet, and yet...

We witness their hostile/playful meet-cute on a park bench, where neither of them gives a shit. Harold (Michael O'Keefe) burps like a volcano and Edith (Angelina Fiordellisi) offers to share a drink out of a bottle that's also a hairbrush. Their conversations flow from music (both are huge fans of Fritz Reiner) to Communism (both miss the passion that comes out of opposition). Nostalgia ensues and the cantankerous two each begins to find their bickering buddy irresistible. And we begin to see the harmony between them, like a pair of mis-matched socks that are somehow perfect for each other. You wouldn't trade this serendipity for the world.

We look into the evolution of a relationship in a world where everything is a metaphor. Harold and Edith shed layers of clothes that are disguises time has put onto their skins. She invites him into her house and is willing to display stacks of her old magazines (her past) out in the open, while he's more concerned about "unsuspecting people" tripping on them. They drink tea like playing a mind game—the teapot is a pair of dice and the cups, a pair of playing cards. They begin to have problems too, perhaps because of insecurity; first love burns like wildfire and it's a scary thing. When things seem too good to be true, we tend to flee, and that's the worst part when it comes to "first love."

The concept of "first love" has always been reserved for the youth. But what is love, really? Two young people falling in love look together into the unknown; their paths are still two straight lines intersecting for the first time. But when two people who have already lived full lives realize a love they've never experienced before, it's like a recognition. Harold and Edith each possess the unique candidacy of someone unburdened by what's next: they have the capacity to remember together, because the paths of their life are more like the tangled branches of trees, and when two trees touch each other for the first time, they can share the memories of a whole forest. Edith says: "there is something frightening about the branches of the camphor tree, about the way they are so tangled... poets will sometimes use the image of the tree to refer to people in love." And it is because of their complexity that their "first love" is all the more worth being examined and relished.

In his uniquely poetic language and fascinating imagery, Charles Mee presents an exquisite love story that is mesmerizing, and above all painfully honest. Director Kim Weild embraces the poetry of the play yet also manages a naturalistic approach when exploring the relationship between

Harold and Edith. The sincere way the performers deliver their sometimes highly expressionistic dialogue indeed adds to the poetry. *First Love* is a specific story about two people finding love for the first time in their 70s, but it is also relatable for anyone who's ever experienced the strangeness of love. It's a story that will make you laugh out loud and weep tears of understanding.

(*First Love* plays at Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce Street, through July 8, 2018. Running time is 1 hour 25 minutes with no intermission. Performances are Tuesdays at 7, Wednesdays at 2, Thursdays and Fridays at 7, and Saturdays at 2 and 7. Additional performances Wed 6/20 at 7, Sun 7/1 at 3, Mon 7/2 at 7, and Sun 7/8 at 7. No performances Tue 7/3 or Wed 7/4. Tickets are \$65 (\$95 premium) and are available by calling 866-811-4111 or at [cherrylanetheatre.org](http://cherrylanetheatre.org).)

***First Love* is by Charles Mee. Directed by Kim Weild. Set Design by Edward Pierce. Costume Design by Theresa Squire. Lighting Design by Paul Miller. Sound Design by Christian Frederickson.**

**The cast is Michael O'Keefe, Angelina Fiordellisi, and Taylor Harvey.**