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# 'Recipe': Playwright salutes older women in political farce

By Chad Jones Published 4:05 pm, Wednesday, October 15, 2014



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Velina Brown plays a reporter sent to interview a group of bakers who are incited to activism.

San Francisco playwright and actor **Michael Gene Sullivan** had a compelling reason to create his play “Recipe,” which receives its world premiere from Berkeley’s Central Works: “I wanted to create roles for women of a certain age,” he says.

Sullivan points out that women rule in the theater, both in the audience and onstage, and yet women of that certain age — let’s say 50 and beyond — see onstage opportunities dwindling or being limited to the nutty aunt, the annoying granny or the lady who types a letter for the lawyers.

“So many women and so few roles,” Sullivan says. “I wanted to create employment opportunities for these women and at the same time create a play that shows how in a lot of political movements, the backbone is often retired women. I’d go down to the Occupy camps in San Francisco and Oakland, and there were always older women with clipboards keeping things moving. These are hard-core progressives who will change the world, if not in their lifetimes, then in their daughter’s or their grandchild’s.”

That kind of passion helped Sullivan cook up “Recipe,” a farce featuring four older female bakers — played by **Tamar Cohn**, **Phoebe Moyer**, **Lynne Soffer** and Jan Zvaifler — whose ’60s activism evolves into something when it seems the “fascist surveillance state” starts listening in on them. **Velina Brown**, who also happens to be married to Sullivan, plays a reporter sent to interview the women.

Adding a political bent to comedy is nothing new for Sullivan, who has been involved with the [San Francisco Mime Troupe](#) since the mid-'90s and is the company's resident playwright.

"This is a big, broad farce, but there's a point to it," he says of "Recipe." "What do you do when push comes to shove?" he says. "When that moment comes and you have a chance to do nothing or something, you need to figure out what you really believe and what you're willing to risk."

Laughter helps sell the message.

"You have to use comedy to get people to open up and to really hear it," the playwright says. "Otherwise, it's depressing and people kill themselves. Then there's no word of mouth because your audience is dead."

The busy Sullivan won't be able to attend opening night for "Recipe" because that's also opening night for [African-American Shakespeare Company's](#) "The Tempest," in which he stars as Prospero. But he'd be there if he could.

"I tried to bring elements of traditional farce and politics together in a way that I don't think has been done before," he says proudly. "And it's all women."

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### **If you go**

**Recipe:** 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday. 5 p.m. Sunday. Through Nov. 23.

\$15-\$28. Central Works at [Berkeley City Club](#), 2315 Durant Ave., Berkeley. (510) 558-1381. [www.centralworks.org](http://www.centralworks.org).

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