

# 'Sissies' sends message of hope

Queen City Theatre Company presents regional premiere of Del Shores play  
by Matt Comer :: matt@goqnotes.com

Del Shores is perhaps best known for his comedic play, "Sordid Lives." In it, Shores weaves together the lives of several members of your classic, dysfunctional Southern family. The story centers around a funeral because, after all, no other family event can get people's emotions as raw and exposed as the death of a loved one.

There's a market for tales of Southern families and the drama that always accompany them and Shores has certainly left his mark in arts and entertainment culture nationally. But, Shores has another play — not as widely known as his "Sordid Lives," but one no less important.

Queen City Theatre Company (QCTC) will present the Carolinas regional premiere of Shores' "Southern Baptist Sissies" (SBS) on Jan. 21 (a day before this issue's street date). The performance continues through Feb. 5 at Duke Energy Theatre at Spirit Square in Uptown Charlotte.

Like "Sordid Lives," Shores' "Southern Baptist Sissies" brings together several different lives and stories, relating the experiences of four young, gay men who grew up in the Baptist church.

Though it is a comedy, QCTC Artistic Director Glenn Griffin says SBS is quite different from Shores' other landmark production.

"This is not 'Sordid Lives,'" Griffin cautions, "where every second you have a laugh. There's a lot of seriousness and it is very sad at a lot of points."

Griffin also strikes back at some points of criticism leveled at Shores and SBS in the past. "This doesn't mock religion," he says.

"Shores really doesn't want you to lose faith in religion, but maybe not look at everything so blindly. Sometimes your leaders or the people you look up to might not always have the right information or might not be right in what they tell you."



The cast of 'Southern Baptist Sissies' (l-r): Berry Newkirk (Mark), Justin Younts (T.J.), Josh Bistormowitz (Andrew) and Steven Martin (Benny).

Each of the four primary cast members agree with Griffin. Berry Newkirk, who plays lead character and narrator Mark, also thinks the play has the ability to serve as a sort of "lifeline," especially for those still attempting to reconcile their faith and identity.

Griffin says last fall's spate of gay teen suicides helped QCTC decide on this show.

"It seemed like a timely piece and we wanted to do a show that could tell it in a funny way but at the same time still hit on a lot of important points," Griffin says.

Several cast members, who are themselves gay, say the show resonates with their own lives and experiences, even as each of the four title characters deal with their own identity and faith journey in uniquely individual ways.

Josh Bistormowitz plays Andrew, who

uses prayer and dedication in an attempt to rid himself of his homosexuality. Bistormowitz says his own upbringing served as an impetus to audition for the role.

"Having a church background I could relate a lot to the characters in the show, especially the four boys going through the struggle of growing up gay in the church," he says. "There are specific situations or things said [in the play] that you have in fact dealt with yourself."

Actor Steven Martin, who plays Benny, also says his childhood serves as an inspiration.

"The story speaks to me," says Martin, whose character seeks refuge in his drag persona Iona Traylor. "I grew up in the South and in a religious home. I understand the struggle of these characters."

In fact, Martin says so much in the show

reminds him of his past he sometimes gets a chill during rehearsals: "So much of the script is like a story in my life," he says.

The play's fourth title character, T.J., played by straight actor Justin Younts, attempts to cure his "unwanted same-sex attractions" through devotion to Scripture and an eventual marriage to a woman. Though Younts has no personal experience growing up gay in the church, he says the play spoke to him and that it carries an important message. Griffin and QCTC Managing Director Kristian Wedolowski say that message is simply, "Never give up hope."

Such a message, they say, needs to sink in not only with their audience but in the Charlotte community as a whole. In the Queen City, which is not particularly known for its LGBT inclusion, plays like SBS have the ability to open a dialogue much like a local production of "Angels in America" did in 1996, they say.

QCTC is also putting their money where the mouth is. A portion of all each night's proceeds will be donated to the Trevor Project, a West Hollywood-based, national non-profit that operates both online and telephone support and suicide prevention services for LGBT young people. QCTC hopes to raise a total of \$3,500 by Feb. 5. Their opening night also raised money for the Regional AIDS Interfaith Network. ::

**more:** Visit [goqnotes.com](http://goqnotes.com) for a special, online-only review of 'Southern Baptist Sissies.'

## If you go

"Southern Baptist Sissies"  
Jan. 21-Feb. 5  
Duke Energy Theatre  
Spirit Square  
345 N College St.  
Tickets \$16-\$24 on sale at [Carolinatix.org](http://Carolinatix.org)  
or [queencitytheatre.com](http://queencitytheatre.com) or by phone  
704-372-1000.

A&amp;E

## Opera

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1/29-2/6 // CHARLOTTE

La Traviata

With opportunities to catch either glimpses of this masterpiece at "Opera Dinners" or the full performance at Belk Theater Feb. 3-5, you have zero excuse to miss Opera Carolina's 2011 production of "La Traviata."  
[operacarolina.org](http://operacarolina.org)

3/25-29 // WINSTON-SALEM

5/12-15 // CHARLOTTE

H.M.S. Pinafore

This English-language, comic opera by Arthur Sullivan and W.S. Gilbert opened in London just over 130 years ago. Now it comes to the Carolinas, with performances in both Winston-Salem and Charlotte.  
[piedmontopera.org](http://piedmontopera.org)  
[operacarolina.org](http://operacarolina.org)

4/28 // RALEIGH

Faust

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[ncopera.org](http://ncopera.org)

5/12-13 // DURHAM

The Turn of the Screw

Credited as partly inspiring "The Others," starring Nicole Kidman, this English-language opera was first inspired by the spooky, ghost-ridden novella by Henry James and published in 1898.  
[ncopera.org](http://ncopera.org)



A 2005 production of 'La Traviata.'

Photo Credit: Opera Carolina

— compiled by Matt Comer