

Theater Review: John Michael is Really Cooking in 'Meatball Seance'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 6, 2017 - 10:33am

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CHICAGO – Currently, one of the best monologists in Chicago – and certainly one of the nuttiest – is John Michael. After notorious and successful runs of his last two one-man shows, “John Michael and the Order of the Penix” and “Dementia Me,” Michael is taking on his dating life once again in the fun and hilarious “Meatball Seance.” The show has a Thursday night slot at Mary’s Attic in Chicago’s Andersonville neighborhood through April 6th, 2017. [Click here](#) [21] for more details, including ticket information.



Play Rating: **5.0/5.0**

John Michael keeps his shows fluid by using crowd participation, and his latest one-man story time has members of the audience on stage with him for about 90% of the time. It is a perfect way to illustrate his up-and-down dating life, told in uproarious detail by Michael, wearing an apron, socks and designer underwear. The show barely takes a breath as it centers on a meatball recipe by Michael’s mother, as the apron-clad Don Juan uses the cooking sessions to find her spirit and evaluate his potential hook ups.



John Michael Conjures the Spirit in 'Meatball Seance'

Photo credit: [JohnMichaelPlays.com](#)

The main theme is the expression of dealing with the death of a loved one, and John Michael is trying to find his way after the passing of his mother. It also has to do with his move from the Texas environs of Dallas to Chicago, and meeting new and potential boyfriends. Various audience members, selected by Michael, portray the man pals and support system, and their interaction with this newcomer to the Windy City is part of the assignment. There will be recipes shared, prep work done and lots of cooking, both in stagecraft and reality.

To know John Michael is to love him, as he maintains a stage energy that combines whirling dervish with thoughtful observer. The death of his mother has changed him forever, and getting to the other side of it...while negotiating a new place to live...colors a spectrum of emotions. But mostly – and as a thought toward anybody in mourning – it's about understanding the happy side of memory beyond the loss, and using the "seance" of an old recipe as one way to connect to that happiness.

On the night I saw the show, the audience participants were very good sports, often riffing on Michael's antics as he fluttered around them (the participation is purely voluntary, but recommended if you like to have fun). Michael likes props and illustrative stage tools, and a full kitchen is set up to create the recipe and the seance associated with it. This gives the interpretation of the story material an improvisation feel, and allows the audience "characters" something to do while Michael relates his adventures. Several great belly laughs occurred just by the momentous task of participants unexpectedly cooking on stage.



John Michael Searches for Characters in 'Meatball Seance'

Photo credit: JohnMichaelPlays.com

The beauty of John Michael is his infectious presence and desire to communicate the delicate intricacies of his life force. He is a heart-on-the-sleeve type performer, but he never is maudlin. The character of his mother, and their life together, was ardently pursued as a desperate sadness in his previous show, "Dementia Me." In "Meatball Seance," his mother as used as a measure for his assessment of boyfriends, and the recipe is the conduit to their souls.

Mary's Attic, where the show is performed, is one the great small spaces in Chicago, combining professional staging with an intimacy that is a reminder of a fancy finished basement. Oh, and by the way, if you choose to participate as one of John Michael's characters, a free drink is coming your way. Which is a perfect way to toast the recipe, the spirit and the latest work from an enormous talent.

For a Podtalk with John Michael, by Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com, [CLICK HERE](#). [22]

John Michael's "Meatball Seance" takes place every Thursday night @ 7:30pm through April 6th, 2017, at Mary's Attic, 5400 North Clark Street, Chicago. Written by and featuring monologist John Michael. Directed by Janet Howe.



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