
BY MARGARET GRAY

'Steambath' at the Odyssey

The essentials: In 1970, in this hit comedy, Bruce Jay Friedman (who later wrote "Splash" along with a lot of other films, novels and plays) envisioned the afterlife as a steam room and God its Puerto Rican bath attendant. At the time, the notion that God could be a member of an ethnic minority struck audiences as one of the wackiest aspects of Friedman's risqué metaphysical romp. Praising Hector Elizondo, who won a Tony Award, New York Times critic Clive Barnes marveled, "He almost convinced me that God is a Puerto Rican steambath attendant."

Why this? Some of "Steambath's" jokes, unabashedly trading in hoary ethnic and gender stereotypes, haven't held up well. But the Odyssey's longtime artistic director Ron Sossi found something in Friedman's playful vision worth re-exploring. The acclaimed stand-up comedian Paul Rodriguez plays God. Does this piece of cultural history have anything to teach us, or will we regret digging it up? There's only one way to find out.

Details: Odyssey Theatre, 255 S. Sepulveda Blvd., L.A. 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays (see website for complete schedule). Ends Dec. 16. \$32-\$37. (310) 477-2055 Ext. 2; *odysseytheatre.com*.