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Diaries of
Strangers with
Cheese Balls

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The Book of Liz
by Amy and David Sedaris
Directed by Joseph Benesh
Space 55 Theatre Ensemble
Artstagesound, Phoenix
(602) 663-4032
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\$6.00 - \$8.00

If you've read or seen any of the works of brother and sister satirists **Amy Sedaris** (*Strangers with Candy*) and **David Sedaris** (*Santaland Diaries*), then the script for ***The Book of Liz*** will sound very familiar. Amy has a tendency to find humor in the earnestly absurd, while David loves to tell stories of people overwhelmed by the weird things we accept as real life. This play is a nice blend of these two styles. Director **Joseph Benesh** and his cast have captured the fourth grade pageant feel that best sells this little oddity. **Space 55 Theatre Ensemble** loves putting up these strange scripts, but if you have experienced any of the works of these two writers, you might feel as though you've seen some of this before.

Fans of Amy will appreciate the lead character, deadpan and unappreciated Liz (**Lauren Henschen**), a member of the "Squeamish" religious sect that shuns

modernity and sells her famed cheese balls to support their isolation. Fans of David will love character's Oxana (**Shawna Franks**) and Yvon (**Steve Wilcox**), a pair of Lithuanian expats with Cockney accents who help Liz after she escapes the compound. Then there's Duncan (**Shawn Murphy**), the manager of the restaurant at which she works who introduces her to the world of 12-stepping. It's all extremely quirky, sometimes a little repetitive, and Space 55 mounts a production that is nowhere near polished, but there is a nice little bang at the end of the evening.

The production does feel at times like a long episode of Amy's Comedy Central sitcom, but even when it becomes tedious, there is always something to enjoy just around the corner. Benesh has pushed the amateur qualities of the show and performances. Henschen is practically a zombie through her first encounters as a stranger in a very strange land. Just when you think that she'll never emote, along comes a semblance of a character arc that justifies the deadpanning prior. Murphy is good at making his three characters interesting in each of their own rights. Franks is the liveliest of the bunch, her oft-shrill voice punching the humor of her four characters. Wilcox does a well with his characters, but it is his moment near the end with Henschen that allows the audience their moment of charm.

Space 55's new space is an oddly shaped studio that offers the views of backs of heads to people more than two rows back, so be sure to come early. This company is carving out a niche as a presenter of silliness and frothy lunacy.