

ENTERTAINMENT

Intense despair and a trombone

Straight Ahead and Blind Dancers.
Chinook Theatre
Through February 3rd

review by **Christophe J. Sadelain**

As this season's third production, Workshop West Theatre presents Canadian playwright Charles Tidler's two Chalmers Award-winning one act plays: *Straight Ahead*, and *Blind Dancers*.

Placed in 1945, *Straight Ahead* is a poignant forty-five minute monologue. While waiting for her father and his two helpers to come and eat the supper she has brought them, Louisa Potter remembers and relives her past, or fantasizes about the future where she sees herself as America's Sweet Success being interviewed by a radio announcer. Singing out her sorrow, pain, and hope, she comforts herself and soothes the stirring baby in her womb.

After a somewhat hesitant start, Susan Sneath energizes her character with an intense sense of despair, making this play a very compelling and very personal account. The singing, though obviously not Sneath's forte, is very effective in permeating the atmosphere with dispirited hope. Morris Ertman's stage is kidney shaped and raked, giving the audience a good sense of the fields stretching out at Louisa's feet.

Even though it is more or less a continuation of Louisa Potter's life story, *Blind Dancers* stands on its own as a play about two people's new found awareness of their long term needs.

It's the summer of 1947; Louisa, now a struggling single mother, wakes up in a cheap hotel room with two companions at her side.

One is a brass trombone, the other is a third rate "bone man" travelling the country as a replacement for a jazz band. It is with a new sensation that Dell Martin wakes up after this thirty-six hour long one-night-stand. "I feel real peaceful, satisfied, like I haven't felt in a long, long time," he says. Louisa, on the other hand, is frightened, not only by the sight of her's and Dell's name on a marriage license, but also because she has broken her own rules. "I won't let no man have a hold on me," she had once vowed.

In this, the evening's second play, Susan Sneath's performance is electric from start to finish. John Bryden's performance as Dell Martin is strained from the opening scene on, and a poor voice characterization makes the "bone man" completely artificial. At times, however, Dryden's obvious talent does show through, and considering his experience it isn't unreasonable to expect him to turn it around and give this production the success it deserves.

Blind Dancers' well designed set and perceptive lighting are superb, much to the credit of U of A MFA design graduate Morris Ertman.

Although it is regrettable that she was unable to make her actors more comfortable with each other, Dorothy Haug's direction is straightforward and skillful, making this production an enjoyable one to see.



Left: John Bryden plays "bone man," Dell Martin. Above right: Louisa wakes up one morning to find "The bone man" at her side and her name on a marriage license.

Photos Tim Kubash



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