Nuclear Family finds friends within a self-styled implosion

By REBECCA CANN

he family unit is not breaking down, it's blowing up. Act I.V.'s current production of Eugene Stickland's The Family incites the implosion at the Adelaide Court Theatre until November 24th.

Directed by Larry Lewis, the production is a remount of the company's December '84 production at Theatre Passe Muraille, and affords a look at a rather unusual and strangely funny family.

Act I.V. was formed in November of 1984 by four York University theatre MFA graduates committed to "dynamic, innovative theatre." Playwright Stickland's use of the term 'bizarre' to describe their work seems more appropriate in light of The Family, which he describes as "a kitchen-sink drama gone berserk." The description fits.

The Family is appropriately titled since it is a sum of characters rather than a story. The plot in itself is banal; the Devine family and friends wait for the return of son Douggie (Evan B. Turner) from his peace mission in Cyprus. Douggie, of course, arrives home dead. The difference between plot and play is represented in the actual appearance of Doug



"Yes, dear, you have an exquisite profile . . . but let's get on with the play." The Family continues its antics at the Adelaide Court Theatre.

who marches through the front door with his coffin on his back and promptly settles down underneath it in the middle of the living-room

Reality plays as big a role in The Family as natural flavourings do in Jell-O. Yet the trappings are there. The set, designed by Jeff Freedman is a typical livingroom. A basket piled with assorted sewing stands on the table beside the couch. The TV sits in a corner. But the five chain locks on the front door are fixed on the wrong side, and the telephone is in the audience, isolated as far from the stage as possible.

The lighting, too, maintains a

sense of reality that disappears at a given notice. Designed by Marta Stothers, lights will suddenly focus on one person, one thing, one area of the stage, blotting out realism by creating sharp contrasts. When the telephone or front door-bell rings the attention is there, in sharp white light, emphasizing the ominous presence of the outside world.

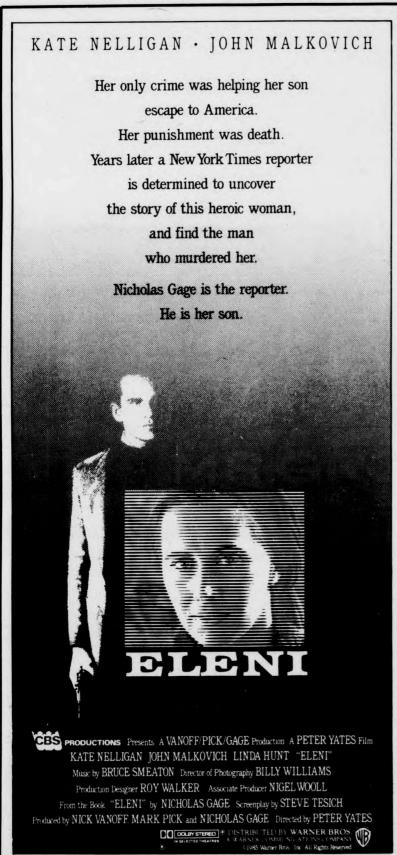
The Devine family has learned how to deal with the outside world. They ignore it. Dad to the clan, Sory Devine (Anthony Dunn), resembles a mad scientist as he, in deadly earnest, puts his goggles in place, pulls sheepskin flaps over his ears, and proceeds to disappear into the world of gravitational pull. Mother Devine (Sally Singal) is a sex-starved housewife, pattering about on tiptoe in a searingly tight lame evening gown, collecting her cigarette ashes in the palm of her hand. She has discovered knitting as a salve to soothe the wear and tear of everyday life and she knits thin air with emphatic gestures reminiscent of an up-tempo streetcorner evangelist. Devine daughter Cerberus, played with brilliant concentration by Maria Bonanno, spends the entire evening glued to the boob-tube, while images of Robert Urich and the like gracefully flit by.

The family's friends seem to have trouble deciding whether or not they should be coping with reality or the Devines themselves. Gerry Quigley's Roger, Douggie's best buddy, skulks and scurries around the furniture,

terrified pup one moment, gaunteyed psychotic devil the next. He eventually succumbs to the Devine magnetism, as does would-be daughter-in-law Jess (Roxanne Hill), whose apathy towards life turns to peculiar pleasure as part of the

What transpires onstage is a collection of neurotics-cum-psychotics trapped in a world of their own making. The Devine livingroom reverberates with futile energy as each character enacts his or her own twisted stereotype. These people are inconsequential to everyone but each other, the result of insisting on the maintenance of their individual labels. By over-emphasizing the nuclear family as a unit of role models there is no space for individuals to grow and develop. The Devine fear of the outside world is a recognition that none of them would be able to respond on a significant level to outside stimulus. But instead of disintegrating, The Family suggests that self-styled individuals move into a world of extremes where selfdestruction is the only end. Implosion is inevitable, and the only people affected are those responsible.

The beauty of Act I.V.'s The Family is that these ideas are rarely overemphasized. They are simply there for the taking. Frequently funny, ridiculous and more often than not bizarre, there are a thousand responses possible after witnessing the mayhem of the Devine livingroom. As an audience member you are given a choice; pick a reaction, any reaction. It will probably fit the bill.







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