

Initial promise fizzles in Citadel's Cecil and Cleopatra

Cecil and Cleopatra
Citadel Shoctor Theatre
through February 5

review by Cathy Duong

The first few minutes on the set of *Cecil and Cleopatra* promise a reasonably entertaining evening. This is probably due to the impressive set and the abundant energy emanating from Rosita McCall. However, the initial anticipation of an eventful play slowly fizzles out and becomes numb bewilderment. To add to this, there is the realization that this set is to occupy the stage for nine-tenths of the evening.

Cecil and Cleopatra, a two-character play, had its premiere at the Shoctor theatre last Thursday. Margaret Avery, who received an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actress for her performance as Shug Avery in the movie *The Color Purple* plays the part of Rosita McCall. Paul Soles, perhaps best known as the host of *Take 30* and as the lawbreaker in *This is the Law*, plays Cecil Stein. The play is about Rosita, a licensed occupational nurse from Missouri who comes to the residence of Cecil, an ailing acting instructor. Rosita needs her job to pay the rent and Cecil needs Rosita to be his acting student because he has to "teach or die." A strange arrangement then takes place: Rosita is granted her job and resides with Cecil in return for her time as his student.

Hence begins the student-teacher, naive woman-eccentric man relationship between the two characters. As expected, we are

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then subjected to a lot of squabbling and sentimental moments between the couple. Cecil goes on to teach Rosita the role of the Shakespearean heroine, Cleopatra. He also surprises her by revealing that Cleopatra was black and that the actual pronunciation of her name is Cleopaytra. There are attempts at humour but many of the jokes seem artificial, such as the numerous comments about religion, the Missouri dialect, and Jewish stereotypes (Cecil is Jewish).

Perhaps the funniest part of the play occurs in Rosita's church. Here Cecil,

driven by inexplicable imprudence, jumps out from his wheelchair in the church pretending to be miraculously cured and loudly screaming out his gratification in front of the congregation. Meanwhile, Rosita, because of her deep religious faith, angrily runs home after venting her anger in obscenities directed at Cecil. This situation, unfortunately, might not be very funny to some. The predictable make-up scene follows with Cecil blaming Rosita for dragging him to church in the first place.

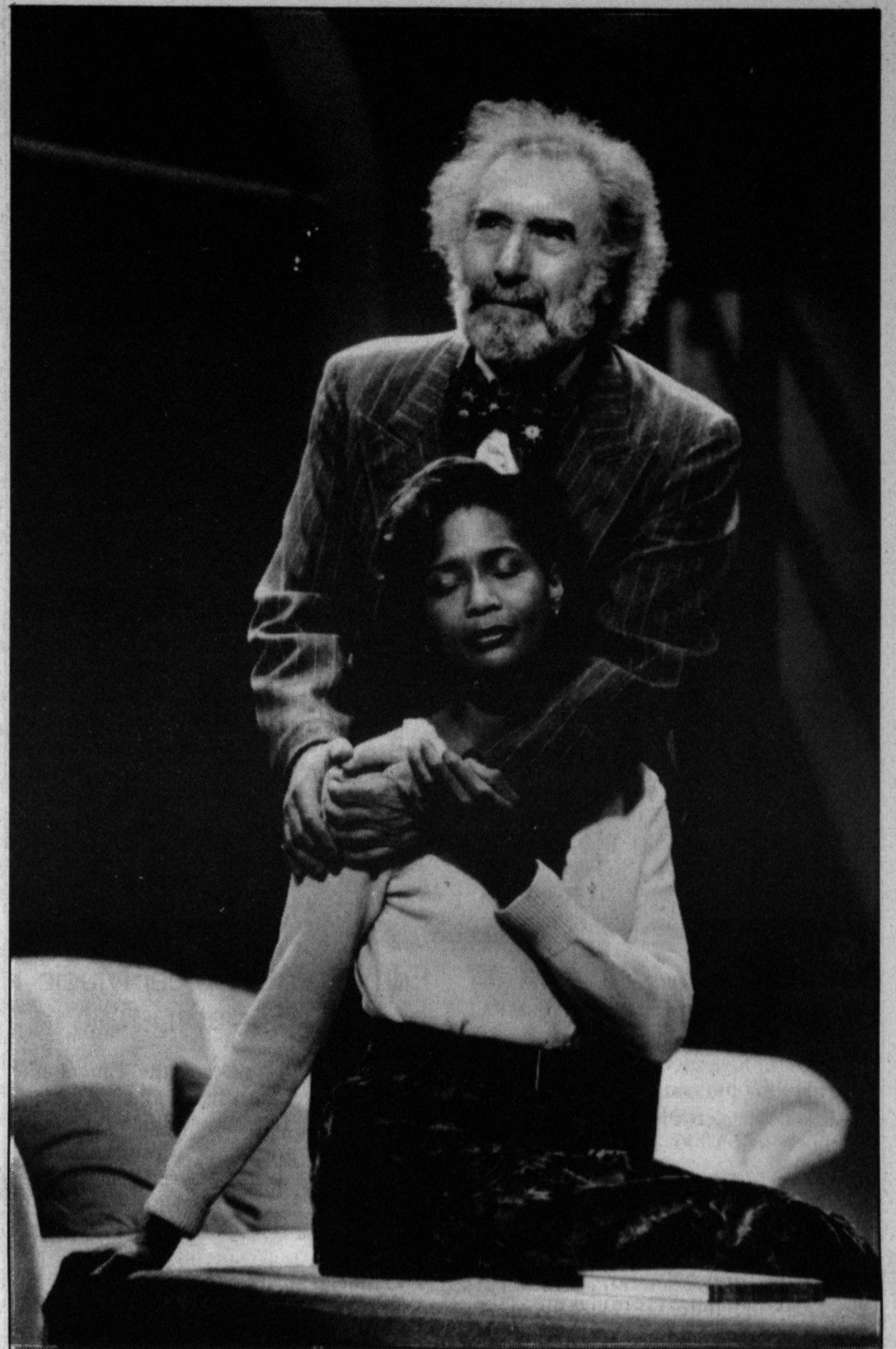
During several parts of the play, we hear the splash-splash of Cecil and Rosita frolicking while she is performing her

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nursing duty of giving Cecil his baths. We also hear that Cecil has vexed Rosita by hiding her expensive soap under something very "large", which merely confuses our perceptions about their relationship. The lack of chemistry between them conveys no apparent romantic interest, and yet the poignant student-teacher relationship is not obvious either. The question of whether or not the irascible Cecil really loves Rosita and vice-versa, or whether each is just performing his/her duties to maintain his/her needs is not answered until the very last scene.

Paul Soles projects charm in his part, although he is confined to a wheelchair for most of the play. Margaret Avery possesses an articulate voice but it is not powerful enough for her final triumphant moment. Some of Rosita's gestures seem deliberate, making the viewer conscious that he is watching an actress in a role instead of being empathetic with the character. Rosita exudes a lot of energy although throughout the play one question kept nagging my mind: why does she not become smart enough to straighten out Cecil for once when he starts one of his condescending speeches? Instead, he usually sends her tearfully flying to her room.

This was the first performance for this new play, and it showed. Fortunately, the second act went a long way towards making up for the deficiencies of the first. With two talented performers, there is hope for *Cecil and Cleopatra* yet.



Paul Soles and Rosita McCall are unlikely roommates in *Cecil and Cleopatra*, a brand new play at the Citadel Shoctor Theatre.

Wide-ranging amusement in Shamas' *The Cycle Continues*

My Boyfriend's Back and There's Gonna Be Laundry: *The Cycle Continues*
Phoenix Theatre
through January 29

review by Mark Primmer

You're a woman and your biological clock is starting to tick. Marriage seems like a nice idea, and you've been wondering what it would be like to have a baby or live on the set of *thirtysomething*. At age 12 you swore that you'd never get married. Inspired by free love or an independent spirit you've maintained that vision for nearly two decades, that is, until recently.

We don't need to name him. If you're Sandra Shamas, his name is Frank. Separate and independent, both you and your guy have the same purpose — sort of like you both belong to the same windshield wiper of life. You're living with one another, but it's only for convenience sake. Rent is high, and you both agreed that living together could save each of you a lot of money. Sex? Well, you admit it's great, but what's that got to do with it? Then, oh heck, who knows what happened, you got talking to this real estate agent who said it would be wiser if you bought a house. It took some time, but he agreed, and now, \$187,000 later, you've taken to wearing an apron around the house and hinting at marriage.

Sound familiar? Quick then, rush down to the Phoenix Theatre and catch up with Sandra Shamas' one woman show. Fast

paced, witty and intelligent, Shamas captures the mystery of the "me now/me then" syndrome which, if you haven't laughed yet, deserves some immediate relief.

Shamas exhibits a wide range of facial and body expressions, and changes of voice; from that of a raunchy eighty year old woman by the name of Natti Caldwell whose favorite words are "fag" and "bisexual", to her mother who "ate television", to Shamas as a child — sweet but

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coy, darling but dangerous. "I hate to squelch his spontaneity," she explains to her frantic mother, having let her two year old brother, "the intrepid explorer", which he is, wander down the Trans-Canada Highway in his walker heading for Victoria.

The show is full of digressions, and if I've managed to squeeze out a theme for the show, don't be surprised when you find that it begins with "the evolution of men's underwear," then shifts to "dialogue from Hell," or the depiction of women in advertising. Akin to her infant brother pushing himself down the Trans-Canada Highway, Shamas moves onwards but shifting sideways, providing inescapable amusement to her audience.



Sandra Shamas and domestic machinery. Her one-woman show at the Phoenix is a multi-topic laugh fest.

Jeff Cowley