

Phoenix eavesdrops on someone else's love life

Italian American Reconciliation
Phoenix Theatre at the Kaasa
through November 5th

review by Rosa Jackson

Anyone who has ever suffered from a paralyzing fear of the opposite sex should see *Italian-American Reconciliation*, a romantic comedy by John Patrick Shanley now showing at the Kaasa Theatre. The play features a cast of neurotic yet somehow normal characters, each of whom must confront his or her own fears about relationships. This makes for an engaging and often hilarious evening's entertainment, despite some overdramatized romantic scenes.

As the play opens, the atmosphere of New York's Little Italy, where the events take place, is immediately evoked. Aldo Scalicki, a charming young Italian, saunters up and down the aisles of the theatre, affably greeting the patrons. "My mother is here tonight!", he announces proudly. He then launches into a story about his friend, Huey Maximilian Bonfigliano, warning the audience that there will be a lesson to learn from it. The lights in the theatre go down, and the drama begins to unfold.

Huey is evidently in a state of torment; we first see him sitting at his desk, wearing a frilly white blouse and writing tortured poetry. He confesses to Aldo that he wants to reconcile with his ex-wife, Janice. Janice is rather an intimidating woman, though; during the break-up she not only killed Huey's dog, but tried to kill Huey as well. Aldo, and Huey's new girlfriend Teresa, believe that Huey is simply going through an "insane stage." After all, they reason, why would he want to go back to someone who treated him like a dog?

Aldo is given the unpleasant task of talking to Janice and thus paving the way for Huey. This is especially difficult because Janice hates Aldo; throughout their childhood she took great pleasure in playing at murdering and burying him. Somehow, though, Aldo manages to communicate with her, and they find something in common: they are both

terrified of love.

The resolution which arises out of Huey and Janice's encounter is unexpected and thankfully not clichéd. Romantic love is reaffirmed, but in a realistic rather than a fairy-tale way. At the same time, the play shows how people cling to stereotypic ideas of what it means to be a man or a woman, even while this is being redefined.

The dialogue, while often witty and thought-provoking, makes the characters' psychologies seem too simple and obvious. We are led to believe that nearly all of Aldo's and Janice's problems stem from the fact that neither of them really grew to know and love

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their fathers. While this is cause for some sympathy, at times their introspection and self-pity become irritating.

Huey's girlfriend, Teresa, is also somewhat one-dimensional. She wants to break up with Huey, but can't find the strength to do it. Then, when he initiates the break-up, she begs him not to leave her. Her reaction is too predictable to arouse the audience's interest in her character.

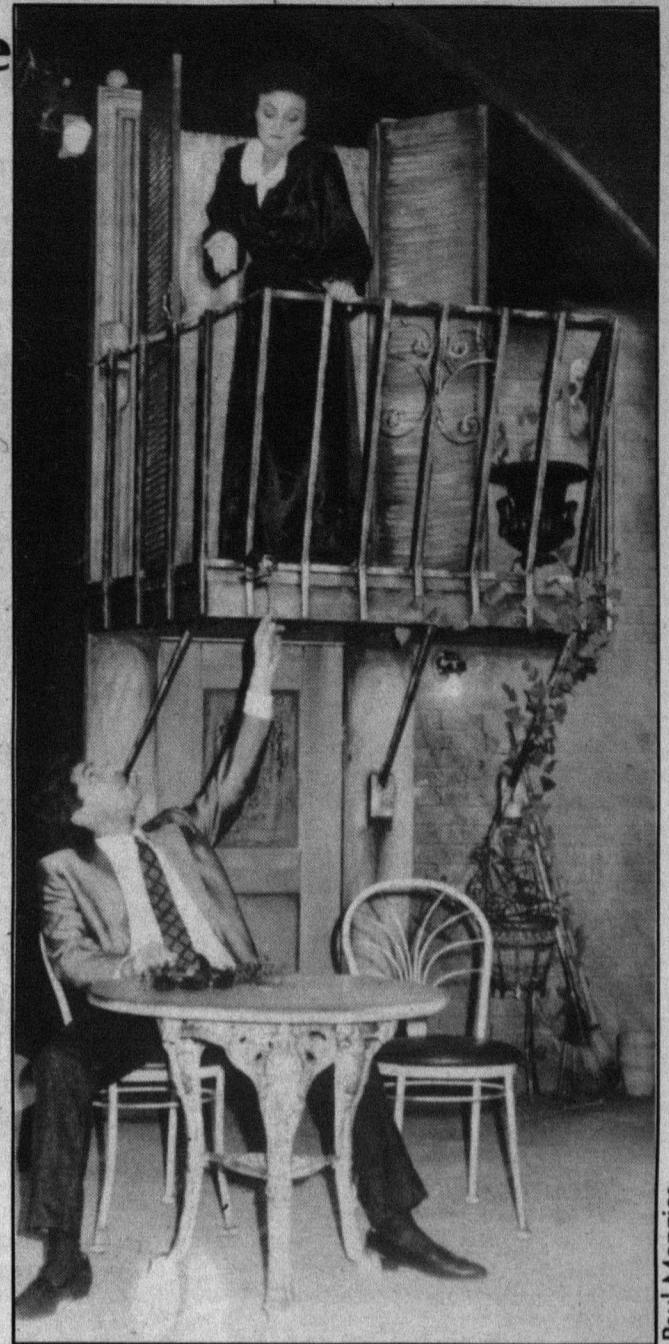
One of the best performances in this production comes from Maralyn Ryan as Teresa's Aunt May. Aunt May is a middle-aged widow who has not been afraid to take risks in life. She convinces both Teresa and Aldo to follow their hearts, and in doing so puts real feeling into her words.

David Mann is believable as Huey, a man ruled by his emotions and not ashamed to love. His irrationality, his sincerity and his ridiculousness provide many of the funniest moments in the play. Frank Pellegrino, as Aldo, is flamboyant and full of energy throughout the play. He is successful in establishing a rapport with the audience.

As Janice, Julie Bond is perfectly cast. Her smile is evil enough to fit these words of Aldo's: "You always smile for the most wrong, the horriblest reasons." She is better at being evil, though, than she is at being pathetic. When she shows her vulnerability, strangely enough, she is not very likeable. Teresa is well played by Jan Wood, although the role's potential is limited.

The intimate Kaasa Theatre is the perfect venue for this Phoenix production. The audience is made to feel that it is experiencing the action first-hand, sitting at the tables in Pop's Soup House, waiting to be served a bowl of minestrone. The set is well-designed, and strings of multicolored lights add to the atmosphere.

In this day of confused relationships, why not spend an evening eavesdropping on somebody else's love life? *Italian American Reconciliation* is on at the Kaasa Theatre until November 5th.



Aldo, Aldo, wherefore art thou, Aldo?

Paul Menzies

Hip 2000 light years from home

The Tragically Hip with
Bruno Gerussi's Medallion
Dinwoodie Lounge
Saturday, October 14

review by James Ingram

Saturday's Tragically Hip/Bruno Gerussi's Medallion concert was, for me anyway, a reminder of a simpler, better era of rock music. It was a journey back to an age when bands could tour without a hairdresser, a media-relations consultant, a wardrobe director, a dry ice machine, and a hit video. It was a nostalgic trip to the glorious early eighties, that time when we put on the shabbiest, most tattered clothes we owned and went to foul-smelling community halls and warehouses to see bands that were dressed even worse than we were. Saturday's illusion wasn't perfect, of course. The venue, Dinwoodie, didn't really smell that bad at all and the crowd was disappointingly fashionable, but the music was right: simple, fast, and loud.

The headliners, the Tragically Hip, showed why they remain a very popular act across the country, even after the release of a somewhat mediocre LP. They played about two thirds of the latest record, a few songs from their previous EP, and some new songs, which left them with less familiar material, including a scorching cover of the Rolling Stones' "Two Thousand Light Years From Home" in their second encore. Songs that seemed undistinguished on record had more than sufficient hooks and energy to get the audience involved, so much that some slam-dancing broke out toward the end of the show. (When was the last time you saw that at a university event? It was like being in grade eight again.) The uncluttered instrumentation was also very effective live, with a tight, forceful two-guitar texture over a lean, uncomplicated, power-blues rhythm section.

The real reason why the Hip are so much better in concert than they are on record, however, is singer Gordon Downie. Besides a distinctive voice that varies from a gruff bark to a high quaver oddly like Tracey

Chapman's, Downie has charisma and energy in abundance. His shirt and hair were soaked half way through the set because of his unusual acrobatics. He sometimes leapt around the stage like an animal, sometimes danced (it wasn't really dancing, but I can't think of what else to call it) like someone trying to fight their way out of a garbage bag while having an epileptic fit, and sometimes simply threw himself against his microphone stand in a bizarre parody of the slam-dancing crowd. All the while he looked into the audience with the manic, Jack Nicholson smile of a precocious eight-year-old boy who has been discovered dissecting the cat with his Mechno set.

Downie's highly unique style was best exemplified by his stage patter during one song toward the beginning of the set. During

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an instrumental break he leaned over slightly, stared fixedly into the crowd, held out his arm and started to send abrupt, break-dance like waves down it every few seconds. He explained that this was the motion a cheetah's spine made as the animal ran. (If this had any bearing on the song, I missed it.) "Twenty foot leaps," Downie told us with wonder. He suddenly hurled himself across the stage, using his much-abused microphone stand like a pole-vaulter's pole. "Five feet at best. And I'm the one making the big bucks here in Vegas." This sort of thing can't be put on record, but it makes for tremendous live entertainment.

The opening act, Bruno Gerussi's Medal-



Tragically Hip Frontman Gordon Downie exhibits that "Jack Nicholson" smile.

lion, didn't have the musical ability or the stage presence of the Hip, but were reasonably simple, fast and loud in their own right. Frontman Tom Harrison explained that the band had chosen the name because they thought the Beachcomber's chest-ware was one of the few things as loud and tacky as they were. That was really a bit of over-estimation. Their three-chord music was pretty much what you might expect from a not-very-sophisticated touring band or a

highly evolved party band. Either way they were fun, they rocked, they didn't take themselves too seriously, and I liked them. Like the Hip, they were reminiscent of the days when volume, personality, and a beat were all that were needed. The market rules, so I suppose if we buy Janet Jackson and Simply Red and T'Pan, that's what we deserve. And as long as there are still a few bands like the ones that appeared at Dinwoodie on Saturday, I guess I don't mind.

Renee Baril