

# Sculptors, pimps and prostitutes highlighted in alumni productions

By REBECCA CANN

The first thing one notices in the credits is a conglomeration of York alumni. A new theatre company, Pyramid Productions, has gathered together a stream of York-related talent in its production of two one-act plays, David Cameron's *The Sculpture* and Tom Walmsley's *The Jones Boy*. While individual work in the evening is effective, however, an overall lack of focus makes for a watered-down theatre event.

Pyramid's two offerings, playing at the Annex Theatre until February 9, have little in common except, as the program notes point out, they are both "built on extreme situations." But while *The Jones Boy* highlights the struggle of people trapped within a sordid lifestyle, the 'extreme situation' of *The Sculpture* virtually disappears beneath an unreal fervor of witty, racing dialogue and action. Despite this lack of the intended 'theme' for the evening *The Sculpture* maintains a vividness in production that is missing in *The Jones Boy*.

The stylized quality of *The Sculpture* is immediately apparent in the work of lighting designer Rhomney Forbes-Gray. Light pours out of a doorway onto a blackened stage and as Helen, played by Jackie Wray, moves forward, the light shifts position with her. Not until Harry (Steve Walker) tumbles through a doorway does the lighting settle to something akin to reality.

The characters take over where the lighting left off. Harry, a self-acclaimed sculptor, has held Helen prisoner for the past 10 years as inspiration for his work. Helen is rather keen to see the outside world but she's just as keen to help Harry with his sculpture. Harry's sculpture, however, needs more help than Helen can give and Harry is forced to

recognize his inability to bring beauty into an ugly world.

The production is fast-paced and funny. Director Jackie Samuda (also artistic director of Pyramid) has the two actors racing around the stage with fervent intensity, broken by split-second tableaux that emphasize the overblown absurdity of the two characters and their situation. Wray's freeze-frame reaction when called to pose as Picasso's "Two-Headed Woman," Walker's sweepingly melodramatic grappling with his lumpy masterpiece, everything in the production sparkles.

The program's description of *The Sculpture* as a black comedy, however, is disappointing. The basis of the plot is not treated with any degree of seriousness, the theme of Harry's realization is trite. It works



only as part of Harry's character for, as his 'masterpiece' indicates, he has trouble seeing his nose, let alone beyond it. *The Sculpture* gives the audience what Harry gives Helen; flowers on paper—bright, fun but two-dimensional.

The new theatre company Pyramid Productions is currently performing two one-act plays, *The Sculptor* and *The Jones Boy*. York alumni find themselves onstage and off in the two plays and the result is a promising start for emotionally-packed theatre. Lower left: Jackie Wray and Steve Walker in *The Sculptor*. Right: Frankie Van Meter (l) and Gerry Quigley in *The Jones Boy*.

*The Jones Boy* lacks neither seriousness nor intensity, centering on two small-time pimps and their prostitute girlfriends, whose earnings support three of them in their addiction to heroin. The production suffers on several accounts, not least being the theatre space itself. The high-roofed, spacey quality of the Annex Theatre, while adding to the absurd unreality of *The Sculpture*, is incapable of maintaining the tight, claustrophobic atmosphere necessary to *The Jones Boy*. Having four people crammed into a space in front of you does little to discount the roominess above and behind.

Entrapment is the state of the two main characters of the play. Gerry Quigley's portrayal of Lee immediately reveals his fears and tension. Arms dangling, shoulders sagging,



mouth gaping open, Quigley is the strongest presence onstage. Unfortunately many of his scenes are played with Leah David, who portrays Lee's girlfriend Carol in soggy fashion. David emits appropriate emotion but the desperation of her character, and an understanding of it, does not come across. The result is an obscuring of the relationship's dynamics and an anti-climactic end to the play.

This, however, is also the result of Samuda's directing. While playwright Walmsley has previously made clear *The Jones Boy* is "not about heroin" Samuda has failed to make clear what the play is about. Scenes that are potentially central to the theme are raced over, the violence of the script is treated so quickly as to seem insignificant. The only time violence becomes truly

effective is in the role of 'the trick,' played by playwright Tom Walmsley, whose thrashing belt is startlingly menacing. The knives of Lee and Wayne seem like toys in comparison.

The lack of both emotional and thematic highlighting in *The Jones Boy* parallels the difficulties of the evening as a whole. *The Sculpture* offers little but fun, while the potential for thought-provocation in *The Jones Boy* remains submerged. Emotional power in a play is a fundamental need but without intellectual reinforcement theatre moves into the competitive wasteland of TV sitcoms. Pyramid Productions is capable of effective theatre and their first offerings hold promise for the future but their singular emphasis on extreme emotionalism demands attention.

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