

arts

"Backstage" votive motives

by Suzy Kovinsky

Many works of art have been inspired by conflicting ideas about the nature of illusion and reality. However, few manage to present the topic unpretentiously, inspiringly and openly enough to allow an observer to re-examine and explore her own beliefs in a critical and enlightening way.

Backstage Method, written by Dalhousie student David Kennedy and directed by Rob Plowman, welcomes, and at times forces its audience to imagine the possibility that what is commonly regarded as 'reality' is actually a facade created by a society which cannot deal with the dangerous, obscene and at times violent nature of its existence.

THEATRE

Backstage Methods
Written by David Kennedy
Directed by Rob Plowman

Stanley is self-proclaimed 'tortured soul' who aspires to greatness yet finds himself starring in a pop-Shakespeare musical and bussing tables of retirees at a local dinner theatre. Refusing to accept responsibility for his failure as an actor, Stanley cuttingly and wittingly blames his agent Anthony, played by Mike Ferrel, for selling him out and accuses him of passing up opportunities like *Long Day's Journey into Night* and opting for roles such as King Henry and his Louisville slugger.

Ferrel comes across as a Caucasian version of Spike Lee's comical agent in *Mo' Better Blues*; very likable yet pathetically feeble at the same time. One can never fully trust him, unsure if his motives are to help his friend Stanley or to save his own ass by pleasing the director for whom Stanley is supposed to be working. There is a distinct feeling that Stanley has placed Anthony in many awkward situations before, forcing him to 'cash in favours' while the actor goes through his artistic phases.

The play centres around Stanley's obsession with completing the script he is writing which he is sure will revolutionize the theatre and make his name immortal. His fixation on Jack the Ripper is indicative of the void in his life which propels him into isolation and alienation. As he says to Anthony, "You can come into my room, but stay out of my space." *Backstage Method* is a journey into Stanley's space with all of its complexities and pain.

On a search for the completely real, Stanley gets lost and frustrated as the line between fact and fiction becomes blurry, so he takes an extreme position and rejects all of what is commonly thought of as reality and constructs a new definition for what is meaningful.

The most intriguing part of the play is when Stanley violently at-

tempts to convey his newly found enlightenment upon the simple minded Anthony. He thrusts Anthony towards the audience and demands that he acknowledge their presence. Yet Anthony insists that there is no one there and the cutting irony of *Backstage Method* becomes clear as the audience begins to question for themselves which of these characters is

soul who thinks that all plays should have themes, cannot accept Stanley's brutally vivid philosophy which would only complicate the version of life which he has been sold. Stanley also shares Caligula's struggle with the question of how life can have any meaning if it all leads to the same conclusion: death.

Kennedy has created a character



living in a fantasy world and which is dealing with reality.

There are many shades of Camus' *Caligula* in this production. Much like the ancient tyrant, Stanley is overwhelmed by his recent revelation and feels compelled to share it and convert those closest to him. Unfortunately for both Caligula and Stanley, they are alone with their understanding of 'the truth' and Anthony, the simple

who, at first, comes across as a coward searching for an excuse not to deal with his failing career and his position as a mocked outcast. Yet as the play progresses, and as the final act of violence and desperation indicates, Stanley is merely reacting in the only rational way possible if he is to follow his philosophy to its logical conclusion.



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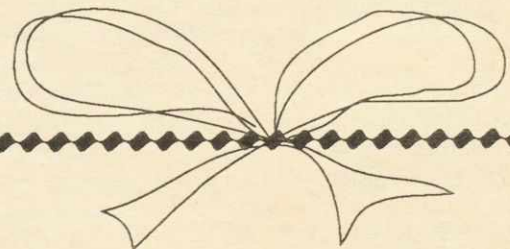
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