

Universal success

Doc
Workshop West
Kassa Theatre
March 14-31

review by Gilbert Bouchard and Dean Bennett

It takes guts to go after a subject that has been a death wish before. Breaking thematic ground is far easier than taking a universality and revamping it for the umpteenth time while at the same time trying to keep its subject matter fresh and relevant.

But Sharon Pollack succeeds.

In her play, *Doc*, the current Workshop West production on the Kaasa stage, Pollack manages to give vibrancy to the universal themes of family and success.

Doc is the nickname of Ev (played by Blair Haynes). *Doc* is a man who has spent his whole life working for his patients. He's always busy, always planning. He works so hard that he alienates himself from the people who should matter most to him: his daughter, his wife and his best friend.

Pollack could have let the play descend into a long, cliché-ridden daughter versus father bitchfest but instead she concentrates on the roots of their conflict — roots that date back to *Doc*'s early years. *Doc* is incapable of giving anything priority over his medical practice.

Pollack goes as far as to hint that even his marriage to Bob (Judith Haynes) was just a ploy perpetrated so the he could quit grad studies but not lose face with his mother. At best, his wife and kids become acquisitions, like a car or house, and at worst, they are hinderances and irritations to his career pursuits.

The clincher is when *Doc* nearly forces his wife into the arms of his best friend by urging him to take her to fancy balls and on vacation. *Doc* eventually abdicates all his duties as husband and father. He is incapable of any emotional commitment outside the one way adoration given him by his patients.

This story, however, does have some problems because what could be said in one

good hour of drama is stretched out into two. You find yourself getting bored during stretches of the second half because the themes expressed in Act One are not elaborated on.

The play is not without wit, though. Examples of Pollack's better one-liners include two sentiments expressed by Ev to daughter Catherine (Susan Sneath). He observes that "The weather is cold enough to freeze a Frenchman's balls" and he chastizes her for "going through men like I go through Kleenex."

The overriding theme of the play concerns people who are trapped. *Doc* is trapped by his burning ambition. Bob is trapped by her love for *Doc* and later by her drinking. And Oscar is trapped by his own frustrations and by the tyranny of his father's shadow.

Katie, Catherine as a young girl (played by Mercedes Dunphy, is perhaps in the saddest trap of all. She's trapped by the expectations of others.

Named after her paternal grandmother who committed suicide, Katie is told over and over how much they resemble one another. This perception almost leads to a

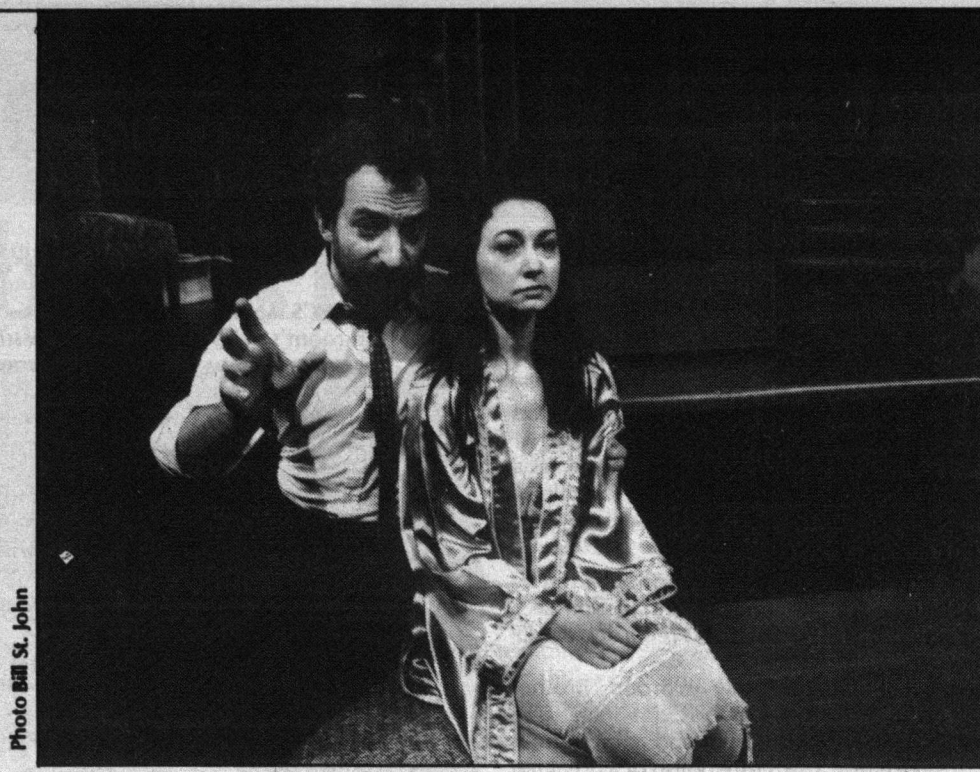


Photo Bill St. John

Blair Haynes and Judith Haynes in *Doc*: giving vibrancy to universal themes

self-fulfilling prophecy as Katie develops a minor death wish which manifests itself in a period of accident-prone behavior.

Katie's trap is the trap of history repeating itself — a trap she escapes by developing a sense of individuality.

Looking at love's harsh realities

The Smiths
Meat is Murder

review by Hans Beckers

I've never met the Smiths' vocalist, Morrissey. I've seen his picture (he's a skinny lad with short black hair and a 1950's-ish look about him) but this is never quite the same. I have, however, heard his latest album, and through it, I've gotten to know Morrissey a little better.

My first impression is that he is an unhappy young man—I don't think it's a coincidence that he used the term "die/death" in seven of his ten songs on this LP. (How often do 'happy-dappy' performers like Michael Jackson or Hall & Oates mention death?)

Besides death, Morrissey's main interest is love, but not the 'boy-meets-girl-gets-

married' aspects. Rather, through his lyrics, he looks at love's harsh realities. He examines rejection in lines like "...[with] all the rejection she's had/to pretend to be happy/could only be idiocy." He also explores loneliness: "...You laugh about people who feel so/very lonely/their only desire is to die." He also focuses on the basic need for acceptance and love: "I am Human and I need to be loved/just like everybody else does." Lines like, "I smoke cos I'm hoping for an early death" show Morrissey searching for the ways in which some of us try to cope with these realities.

These topics could make for some very uncomfortable listening, especially since Morrissey's voice is an acquired taste. Fortunately he doesn't write the music which accompanies his sombre writings. In fact it is the trio of Johnny Marr (guitar), Andy

Rourke (bass), and Mike Joyce (drums) which keeps the Smiths tolerable.

To their credit, all the songs are musically appealing, combining catchy guitar lines with often up-tempo drumming.

Songs like "How soon is now?" and "That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore" combine the lyrics, vocals, and music best and are thus the highlights of the album. Apart from "Rusholme Ruffians" (a personal un-favorite!) the other songs are certainly enjoyable.

The biggest drawback to the Smiths is Morrissey's voice. Once that is overcome, however, this album will be great for those of you who, like Morrissey, believe that love doesn't conquer all (at least, not when you need it most).

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