

Poor scripting and technical problems strip play of its possibilities

Strip
by Catherine Caron, Brigitte Haentjens and Sylvie Trudel.
Adelaide Court Theatre until March 25.

By JASON SHERMAN

The hooker with a heart of gold is a stock character as old as the profession itself. The stripper with a heart of gold, or any heart at all, appears at first glance to be an interesting variation on a theme. But in *Strip*, a too-short attempt to do just this, the guiding principle for the three playwrights seems to have been "don't mess with tradition." What Theatre du P'tit Bonheur's English-language version demonstrates is that a new twist on an old subject doesn't guarantee avoiding clichés until the writers are aware of the traditions they're working in.



The stars of *Strip*, currently playing at Adelaide Court Theatre: Marie Claude (Candy), Muguette Moreau (Gini), and Francine Vezina (Rosita).

Which *Strip*'s writers aren't. It is one thing to suggest that the three women in the play are losers, down-and-outers with nowhere to go, no future but in doffing their clothes for sex-starved masturbators. It is quite another to actually write as though this were the truth. Gini, the most interesting of the three, reminds us of an adage of her mother's: "God gave the poor only one thing—a body. So use it."

Gini hates men, and the men, for Gini, are the customers of the seedy dive she works in. Fellow stripper Candy has a boyfriend, a state of affairs not at all acceptable to Gini, because it implies that at least one of them (the race of men) is human. Rosita, the matriarchal figure, just gives them what they want without thinking twice about the mechanics of her role. But this is about all we can glean from the play. The writers have an interesting metaphor to work with, stripping away exteriors while stripping away clothes to find out what lies underneath, what makes these women tick. There is an opportunity to make these women symbols as well as individuals, but neither are fully realized or even attempted. All we are given are superfluous reasons—the disease rather than the germs which caused the disease. This is where the value of *Strip* is to be found, not in the silly monologues, voiceovers and choral reminiscences about lesbianism, addiction and feminism, which mar the realism the play strives to create.

Director Gilles Provost can be neither commended nor condemned for his work, since what keeps the play moving is in the hands of the actresses and the choreographers who stage the strip routines. This, too, is an area where the production misses an excellent chance to reveal something unique, to catch whatever has been left unspoken. But the dance numbers come off as merely titillating, and more than one audience member duplicated the reported responses of the club audience.

There are, in addition, a couple of purely technical problems—learning to speak English being one of them, a feat two-thirds of the cast seem to think is of secondary importance. More than one line is lost. And a tape recording of an audience member imploring Candy to "take it off baby ooh yeah take it off" is handled so amateurishly that the play is at that moment reduced to the level of an ABC Afterschool special.

At least those same two-thirds of the Francophone actresses are worth watching for their acting talents alone. Muguette Moreau suggests world-weariness perfectly and Francine Vezina is as upbeat and tidy as her role calls for. But Marie Claude, with her Gene Kelly stylizations and otherwise hammy performance, detracts from the relationships built up among the three. The opening scene between Gini and Rosita is the most rewarding of the play. The remaining hour or so degenerates to the stuff of network daytime drama.

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