

# Play perpetuates myths

**A Couple of White Chicks Sitting Around Talking**  
Nexus Theatre  
til Mar. 22

review by Wayne Hoyle

Maude and Hanna Mae are a couple of, uh, suburban housewives who have more in common than is first apparent. This play explores the transformation of these two strangers into close friends.

Maude, whose husband is notably absent, has a fiery interior with a frigid facade. Hanna Mae is a passionate Texas gal who, as a new neighbour, thrusts herself into Maude's orderly life. Hanna Mae pursues the friendship in her pushy southern way despite Maude's earnest denials of interest. Their husbands' indiscretions provide the fuel for this unlikely friendship.

Sherry Wells (director) elicits good performances from both Janet Feindel and Christine MacInnis. Feindel's performance as Maude is tightly controlled, but her character's transformation into a "people person" is pushed too hard and too fast to be believable. MacInnis' Hanna Mae is likeable, although pushed to the point of becoming a caricature.

The compression of a week's action into a single hour tries the audience's patience. It is difficult to accept the blur of changes that take place over that brief time. The script, as well, jumps about and the actresses are hard-pressed to encompass these leaps. Ultimately the problems with the script and the timing render the action unbelievable.

The designer, Robert Shannon, has put together an appropriate set (a kitchen) for the play. The stage colours suggest that you have inadvertently wandered onto the set of a Sunlight dish detergent commercial. However, given the size of the space, the set seems large and interesting with lots of levels to play with.

Though amusing, the play suffers from a

script that is far from the reality of most women's lives. Worse, the play perpetuates dangerous myths about the role of women in society. The characters' friendship is fed by such unlikely fodder as Hanna Mae's husband sleeping with Maude.

The play gives the impression that despite philandering husbands, everything will be all right so long as women can devote one weekend a month to making themselves feel good. This may have cut it in the fifties, but is a little outdated in the eighties.

It is unfortunate that the depth of talent in this play could not have been used in a more socially accurate comedy.

If lunchtime entertainment is what you yearn for, see it. If, however, you seek an insight into the realities of friendships between women, look elsewhere.

## Film witnesses reshaping of triangle of characters

**The Trip to Bountiful**  
West Mall 4

review by L.A. Trofymow

The journey to see *The Trip to Bountiful* only begins once one finds the way to West Edmonton Mall. Take a right turn at the skating rink and follow the passage to the Phase Three food fair. Tucked in the left corner at a rakish angle, one discovers The Cineplex. Ask a friendly gent in a red jacket for directions to theatre number four. Go inside, settle into a seat and ease into director Peter Masterson's gentle tale of mortals.

Geraldine Page as Mrs. Watts gives an Oscar-nominated performance — a nomination she deserves. She is passionate rather than emotively over-blown and is absolutely convincing as an old woman desperately attempting to escape; to seek solitude, peace, and a home.

The film indulges in expressing character and emotions — primarily Mrs. Watts'. The scene in which Geraldine Page and Rebecca



Christine MacInnis and Janet Feindel in *A Couple of White Chicks Sitting Around Talking*

Photo Ron Checora

DeMornay (who debuted in *Risky Business* ride together aboard a Greyhound bus toward Bountiful, Texas exhibits well the gentle unfolding of the story. Masterson allows ample time to develop the bond between the De Mornay and Page characters. Many close face shots in the film enhance the claustrophobic — or comforting — closeness of the bus passengers. These particular shots, coupled with the languid pace of the film, feature the beauty and complexity of human characters — such as Page's Mrs. Watts. Mrs. Watts is thus explored intimately and deliberately.

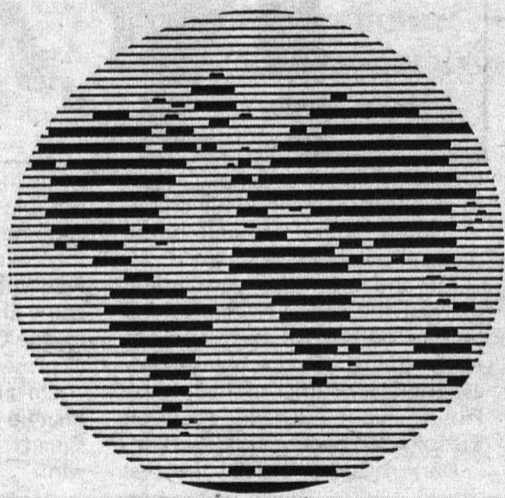
It is in fact intimacy which is both Mrs. Watts' comfort and nemesis. Perhaps it is that in a lonely land such as Texas (as the slimey detective in Joel Coen's *Blood Simple* says), "...out here, you're on your own". But rather than focusing upon the desolation and solitude of the Texas Experience, Masterson chooses to shut out the empty land: there are few shots of the broad, flat horizon.

Instead, he explores one or two characters at a time within the frame.

It is rare to see a film such as this, in which the peak of violence is Mrs. Watts' anguished pleading to return to her home in Bountiful, to put her hands in the dirt — the earth — once more. The film witnesses a journey which reshapes a triangle of characters and relationships. Mrs. Watts, her son Ludie (played by a now-robust John Heard), and her daughter-in-law Jessie May complete that curious 15 year old triangle of conflicts and tension. Again, the closeness of the Watts home in Houston provides the intimacy which comforts and almost destroys its inhabitants. It is Mrs. Watts who must stretch that triangle's apex to Bountiful, and Ludie and Jessie May must follow her lead. The trip to Bountiful is their essential homecoming — one not many mortals find the grace to make.

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