

Automatic Pilot doesn't fly

Automatic Pilot
Theatre 3
until Feb. 15

review by Candy Fertile

The lives of stand-up comics are rarely funny. *Automatic Pilot* is no exception.

Woman (Diane Stapley) dumps younger virile lover so that she can be unhappy and from her unhappiness gain satisfaction as a stand-up comic. Or, woman manoeuvres the exit of the young man because she cannot trust a man or believe one can love her. After all, Alan, her husband of eight years, has emerged as a homosexual and left her, and she has been rejected by the young man's older brother, who cannot take her constant demands for attention.

The main character in this virtual soap opera called *Automatic Pilot* is Charlie, a neurotic, thirty-year-old, scared, self-hating woman. It could be interesting, but it isn't. There is almost no depth to the characters. The play is a collection of one-liners, most of them bad and clichéd and a couple of the better ones straight from Woody Allen (but then he is neurotic, scared, self-hating...).

Unlike Woody Allen, Charlie fails to see the humor in her own situation. She wants to be a stand-up comic but cannot maintain the bitchiness and bitter edge necessary to be "funny" when her personal life is all right. Her type of humor feeds on her personal affairs, but only on the negative side. She has jokes about gays (they freak out over smudged glasses in restaurants but pick up complete strangers), macho guys and their cutesy girlfriends, and, of course, younger lovers.

From the bits of Charlie's stage act seen it's impossible to conclude that the world would lose a great comic if Charlie



Charlie (Diane Stapley) standing with her homosexual husband, Ala (Daniel Buccos) as they discuss pressing matters with her lover Gene (David LaReaney) in bed.

let happiness have its way with her. Her complete dissatisfaction with life shown in her stage routines mirrors her private need to possess someone completely and to be possessed. She is striving for the impossible. She's concluded that she will be unhappy and therefore goes out of her way to make herself suffer. Again, it might be interesting if it weren't so obvious. The men in Charlie's life are constantly pointing out her defects to her. She can even agree, but makes no effort to try and resolve her dilemmas.

Naturally everyone else in the play has problems too. The husband, Alan, is a would-be actor living in Stratford with a young man whose name Charlie can never get right. Eventually he takes off with his true love, a producer who is involved in the same movie that Nick, Charlie's ex-boyfriend, is. Charlie, at this point is living with Gene, Nick's younger brother, who has dropped out of law school to work at the Bay and be a writer. Nick had dumped Charlie a month previously when she went on a fridge-

cleaning binge (his fridge). It is like trying to describe the plot of a soap. In any case all the men realize Charlie has problems beyond their capabilities. Charlie herself jokes about being a complete mess but it looks certain she'll remain that way.

The acting is mostly flat and forced. The confrontations between Charlie and the men in her life lack real sparks. The use of four-letter words is no replacement for feeling. The impact of the strong language is completely lost as it is used constantly. I found myself wishing the characters could think of something else to say.

The set, designed by Allan Stichbury, is terrific. If only the actors had used it more.

Diane Stapley manages to convey Charlie's nervousness and vulnerability. But off the stage, Charlie talks, whines and attempts to love all on the same level. Stephen Walsh handles the role of Nick quite well when dealing with Charlie but the scenes with his brother Gene, are, again, forced and contrived. David Lereany as Gene has some nice moments with Charlie while Nick and Charlie are still involved but once he and Charlie become an item it gets a bit silly. Daniel Buccos (Alan) has a difficult role in that he must portray a man who has doubts about his homosexuality confused with his feelings for Charlie.

I think many of the problems in the acting result from the script. The playwright, Erika Ritter, has been a stand-up comic herself. I can see why she shifted careers, but I don't think her new one is an unqualified success.

At times the play is very entertaining. Just don't go looking for great drama. What you'll find is a small comment on the Seventies, and, after all, the decade wasn't so fascinating.

Automatic Pilot is on at Theatre 3 until February 15.

Straight, simple; abstract and affected

Exhibition of works by Sylvie Stevenson and Nelson Yuen
SUB Art Gallery
Until Feb. 15

review by David Jowett

Sylvie Stevenson's attractive decisive abstractions are currently on display at the SUB Art Gallery. These Vancouver artist's latest works evoke a physical presence with a minimum of materials and technique.

Stevenson has used the usual rectangular format of a painting as a reference point to explore form and movement in a pictorial sense. Paint is implemented as a pure material; first as self-identification through dry muted earthtone colors, secondly as a tool for construction.

Stevenson uses paint-soaked string, hardened in straight lines, as a collage device to effect a kinetic-type motion both inside and outside the painted surface, establishing a physical relationship between painting and environment. The artist has also cut calculated sections from the edges of some of the works to further include the environment into the painting.

This tentative cerebral approach provides Stevenson with a way into contemporary concerns, but may leave

simplicity has carried over into the treatment of the materials rendering certain voices unheard. Sensitivity is replaced by preciousness.

Individually, the pieces are contemplative, and occasionally exhibit a quirky appeal. Collectively they provide a valuable insight into the problems facing those artists who work in the modern tradition.

It is interesting and refreshing to see an artist dismiss more grandiose projects to investigate instead unusual feelings on a smaller, more personal scale.

Also on view are paintings by Nelson Yuen. Yuen has developed a personal imagery in favor of personal experience expressed through formal means. These paintings account for his belief that painting should be a celebratory act.

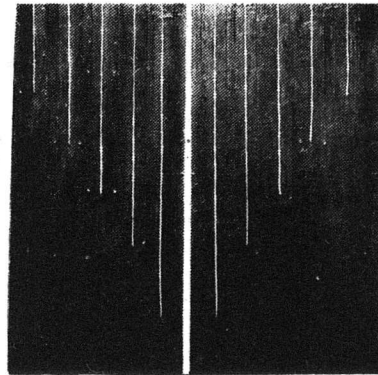
Not truly abstract, they are non-representational with reference to representation. Items such as ribbons, columns and plant life can be deciphered, though their meaning is confused by surrounding unidentified forms. Some of the works have a density of image that could be exploited, but is not.

Yuen is mostly indebted to the Pop Art movement for his style and intent to content. Certain pieces seem to allude to the design and topics of commercial artwork while others evoke the furnishings of religious ceremonies. This eclectic and facile imagery is formed with vivid diaphanous colors giving the paintings an immediate somewhat undesired appeal.

Faced with Yuen's vaguely incongruous images, the viewer is left to marvel only at his ability to produce bright clean colors.

It is worth noting, however, that the smaller paintings have a greater cohesion and are better crafted.

This exhibit closes February 15, while those of Stevenson run until January 30, to be replaced by more of her work until February 15.



Two of Sylvie Stevenson's latest works: on the left, *Black Diptych with graduated descending lines* and *Black Diptych with fanning diagonal black lines*.

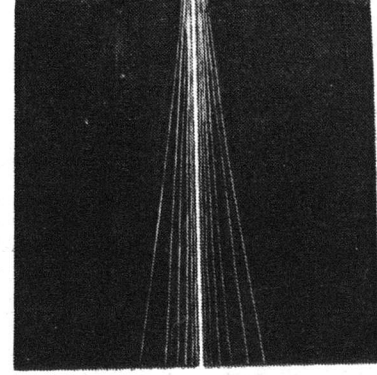


Photo N.F. Goode



One work by Nelson Yuen.

Photo N.F. Goode

Wheelies great; Bitches grate

The Rock and Roll Bitches and the Wheelies
Friday, Jan. 30

review by Brent Jeffrey

The Wheelies and the Rock and Roll Bitches show an interesting combination of disparity and similarity with the stark contrast of their styles and music. At Concordia College on Friday night this was prevalent and the crowd loved it.

The Wheelies, a sixties nostalgia band, generate more energy in one set than Edmonton Power does in a year. They played such oldies as *For Your Love*, *Twist and Shout*, *Stepping Stone*, keeping the crowd on their feet throughout the performance.

The two distinct forces behind the band's success are drummer Erik Smith and singer Mark Vidalin. Smith is without a doubt one of the most incredible drummers in Edmonton, playing not just any beat but a variety of different ones, constantly changing tempo.

Vidalin's strong vocals have captured the feeling of the sixties era helping give the band their believability. But the salient feature of the band's unique repertoire is their clean sound.

However, one negative aspect of The Wheelies presentation was their organization; there was very little. They took their time between songs to confirm the next ones, went in and out of tune, and mixed up the choruses and verses.

The Rock and Roll Bitches, meanwhile, pulling no punches, drove straight ahead with their raunchy, loud brand of rock and roll. Unfortunately, though, their presence and energy didn't make up for their bad music. It is repetitive, uninteresting and so distorted that it becomes indistinguishable. To their credit, they ended with two very good songs *RR #3*, and *She's Been Used*, but, alas, it was too little and too late.

Given time we should be hearing more from The Wheelies and with luck, less from The Rock and Roll Bitches.