

ARTS SECTION

Questions key to Angel's play

Dolly Reisman and Ines Buchli are playwright and director for the theatre company Necessary Angel's production of Mr. Nice Guy. Both are graduates of York's theatre department where they received MFAs. Reisman's thesis piece was a one woman show called Love and Affection. Buchli's graduate work was Mein in which she worked as assistant director under the guidance of Richard Rose. Buchli is presently the Associate Artist Director of Necessary Angel.

Excalibur's Mark Sproul talked with Reisman and Buchli about life after York and their work on Mr. Nice Guy, co-written by Reisman with Tom Walmsley.



Brian Smegel in Mr. Nice Guy.

Q: How did Necessary Angel get started?

Buchli: Necessary Angel started out four years ago doing environmental pieces. They did a show called Tamarra, now playing in L.A., in which the audience follows the actors around a house while the action takes place all around them. Necessary Angel started out working with the audience relationship, breaking down the stage barrier.

Q: Does this play work with any of that?

Buchli: This show doesn't. It's realistic basically. It is an amalgamation of several styles. It has wit, suspense, and something strong to say.

Q: How did you get the idea for this play?

Reisman: Well, Tom and I were friends originally. I guess we met four years ago at his opening night of White Boys (I didn't see the play—I crashed the party). Tom had read a book called Women Who Kill by Ann Jones and then I read it. I was thinking of my thesis one woman show, which deals with violence against women and we decided to collaborate on a piece on the same topic—very different genres though.

Q: How did you write it? Were there specific conflicts you wanted to write into scenes?

Reisman: It's about wife abuse or a couple in a violent relationship. There were questions we wanted to address, for instance. Nobody asks why does the man beat them? At first we thought we could answer things like this, then we realized we weren't going to be able to answer any of them. I did an awful lot of research on battered women; I worked in a shelter one summer. Coincidentally, my husband

works with men who batter their wives. We wanted to make certain points without being didactic. What we hope is that people will leave asking a whole bunch of questions, because I don't think we pretend to have any answers.

Q: What's it like working in collaboration with Tom Walmsley, Ines and the actors in workshop?

Buchli: I think sometimes playwrights get a bad name. 'They get in the way!' I've never found that. I've found Tom and Dolly really supportive. I think the most constructive thing about collaboration is if I come to them and say 'this line doesn't work' they'll argue with me. But more usually, if I can't convince them, they will in the process convince me of a way to make it work. Or they'll convince me enough to keep trying to find a way. I think there's a great merit in that heated type of discussion that some people might take as ranting and raving. It makes a performer, or a director really think. You're constantly having to test yourself through other people. Tom and Dolly work very quickly together, and if I have an idea, or don't think something works one of them will invariably say, "Well piss-off," and the other will say, "Oh no, no just wait a minute, maybe she's got something there." It's happened on both sides.

Q: Does any personal philosophy come through in the play?

Reisman: Well, I think I'm a very hopeful person and I think when I write something I always want to leave the audience feeling hopeful. Even if it's quite bleak like Mr. Nice Guy. The relationship is quite violent on all levels, physical and emotional, but I think it's a very hopeful play. She ends up able to walk out with a lot of dignity and a lot of strength. That's what I'd like to do, to leave the audience a little glimmer of hope. Personally, I hate to walk out of a theatre feeling suicidal. I don't feel it's very helpful at all.

Buchli: It is very tense, but very witty, and I think the audience needs both.

Q: Is your job done once the play opens on the 26th?

Reisman: Yes, I'd say for this production my work's almost done. I'll know a lot more after the end of the run April 20. I'll probably do a rewrite after that.

Buchli: You're never satisfied. You think, "I wish I'd done that in the second week" or there's always something you could work on. I'll stay with it—maybe see it once a week. It only has two characters, and it is a bit fragile. It's like a sponge; it's still just settling into its form.

Downtown Dolly!



Melissa Graham (above) and Jennifer Gula in The Dolly.

By KEVIN PASQUINO

Produced in collaboration by Eran and Eclectic Theatre Productions and playing for a limited run at the Canadian Rep Theatre, the Canadian premiere of Robert Locke's *The Dolly* is an uncomfortable but eye-opening look at the subject of sexual child abuse. While the sexual abuse of children has been the topic of many TV-movies, magazine articles and stories, *The Dolly* brings the tragedy to life by examining how a family deals with the problem on its own, without outside assistance.

The setting of the play is the home of a young, middle class family. Designed by Mary Spyraakis, currently a student in York's theatre department, the set is inexpensively functional. Complete with eating area, living room and a not-too-large, not-too-small Christmas tree in the corner, this is the kind of place Ozzie and Harriet might have lived in before they got a larger house. Everything looks very normal.

But as the play unfolds it becomes apparent that not everyone is filled with the Christmas spirit. The family situation is less that ideal during this festive season because the elderly

father has recently separated from his wife and has no place to turn except to his son. Grandfather has been accepted into the home because, after all, it's the season for giving.

Once the characters are introduced and it's established how family and friends relate to each other, all exit and prepare themselves for a night of rest. Young Susan has had to donate her bed to her grandfather and is forced to sleep on the sofa bed. As her mother sings her a Christmas carol, Susan asks if she can tell Mommy a secret that she and grandpa have, something she isn't supposed to tell anyone. As the young child words it, "Grandpa touches me."

The innocent Susan, played by Jennifer Gula, becomes a haunting presence within the play. She has done nothing wrong except trust a man she should have been able to trust. Gordon Jocelyn plays the difficult role of the grandfather. Introduced over a game of cards and a bottle of booze, the image of this character doing anything wrong or amoral is difficult to accept. He

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