

Leaving the stereotypes

Hosanna explores the politics of love

By Agnes Kruchio

It is a rare and gratifying play that can make its audience hum with excited anticipation months after its first opening; where two actors can carry the whole action and yet produce drama on a most varied and intense human scale, all the while maintaining a tight hold on the audience right to the explosive and poignant finale.

Such a play is *Hosanna* by Michel Tremblay, in a production by Tarragon Theatre now playing at the Global Village Theatre on St. Nicholas Street.

The topic of the play is not to be

approached without trepidation by any director, for it is both sensitive and enormously difficult. It is easily given to exploitation, as indeed it has been in a recent rash of plays and films: the nature and implications of a homosexual relationship.

It is an indication of the sensitivity and talent of the author that this play not only avoids many of the pitfalls of its contemporaries, but by its intricacy and thoughtfulness explores the nature of human relationships in general and love relationships (homo and heterosexual) in particular.

The action revolves around Hosanna, a transvestite hairdresser, played

by Richard Monette, and Cuirette, her biker lover-husband of four years, played by Richard Donat. The time is Halloween, and Hosanna has spent the past three weeks preparing for the moment of her life — to appear at the local club as the idol of her life, Elizabeth Taylor as she appeared in *Cleopatra*.

Her whole career as a drag queen has been a prelude to this moment, which she hopes will make her the uncontested queen of the queens. Instead, it turns into the worst fiasco of her life and she is humiliated beyond redemption by the others.

"I did not know you all hated me so much," she moans. Her viciously quick tongue and arrogance have alienated her from her cronies forever.

In the compressed time period that follows, we are offered an insight into life in the homosexual subculture of Montreal: vicious infighting, infidelities, restlessness, orgies and a constant presence of sex in a meatmarket way that makes the worst chauvinist in the heterosexual world look like a sensitive humanist.

During an incredible 45-minute monologue throughout which actor Richard Monette keeps the audience in the palm of his hand and maintains the dramatic tension without allowing a moment's lag, Hosanna recounts the events of the night, her long preparation and attempts by friends to warn her, and her final humiliation.

Slowly the realization dawns on her that her whole life hitherto has been a sham; that 'her' desire to be beautiful and to look like the real Elizabeth Taylor has been nothing more than a 'papier-maché' dream; and that all of this has conflicted with 'her' other being, 'her' desire to be an active human being, and the profoundest part of 'herself' that was male.

The couple realize they have been trying to act out a heterosexual relationship with all of the trimmings, and that it will no longer work.

It is a credit to all of the people involved that the production is becoming an overnight classic. Director Bill Glassco, has unerringly grasped the thread of the plot and unwound it to

its inevitable ending.

He has avoided the all-too-easy pitfall of making the play either exploitative or inauthentically sentimental. In this he had the help of his two actors, the Richards Monette and Donat.

Monette especially has a range of emotional and vocal tones that renders the play rich and ripe with meaning. His sometimes self-mocking, exaggerated joul-ish French accent makes for many a light moment in the play. Richard Donat plays Cuirette with less artfulness, giving his emotions a chance to shine through his simple honest style.

The play is running until October 6, following which it moves to the Bijou Theatre on Broadway in New York, one of the very few Canadian plays to do so since the '50s. Tickets are \$4 and \$5 on weeknights, \$5 and \$6 Friday and Saturday nights, and \$2 for students at the Saturday matinee. In general there are \$2 rush tickets for students, but don't count on it too much as the play is quite popular.



Richard Monette and Richard Donat appear in *Hosanna*, Michel Tremblay's sensationally successful play produced by Tarragon Productions at the Global Village Theatre. The play is directed by Bill Glassco, who has directed such notable successes as *Creeps* and *Leaving Home*.

MASADA

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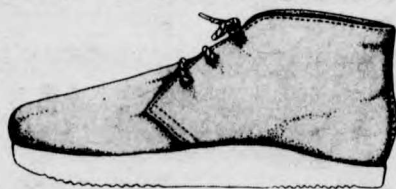
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