

Looking at the horrors of rape

By BRIAN POSER

Extremities, which premiered at the Leah Posluns Theatre this past week, is an intense, frightening, violent, and brutally honest look at the issue of rape.

The award winning play, written by William Mastro Simone, stars actress Susan Hogan (as Marjorie), and actor Robert Morelli (as Raul). Marjorie's two friends are played by actresses Miriam Lawrence (Terry) and Catherine Hayes (Patty).

To set up the play there is a humorous vignette in which Marjorie is stung by a wasp while watering her garden. Her response to the wasp, who is symbolic of her attacker, is one of great aggression; she sprays it with a can of Raid and then burns it with her cigarette. The drama unfolds from there.

Raul enters Marjorie's home, claiming to be looking for someone named Joe and gradually works his way toward raping Marjorie in what is such an intense display of violence that two members of the audience had to leave.

Director Reva Stern commented later that "they just couldn't deal with the violence." Ripping the phone from the wall, Raul utters one of the play's most frightening truths: "call the cops pussy, you can't prove a thing!" But before he can actually rape her she squirms her way to the Raid and blinds him with it. While he is still in shock, Marjorie binds Raul with everything she can find: rope, scarves, neck-ties, belts, and an extension cord, and shoves him into the fireplace, where he remains for the entire play. However, Raul still holds psychological dominance.

"Last year I was filling the potholes in your driveway and I

asked you if I could use the phone . . . you coulda said just plain 'no' . . . you was beautiful wearing your little white shorts as you rode past . . . but you said I looked like a dead dog so I came back here to fuck you," Raul explains.

After this admission, Raul forfeits his control of the situation. Marjorie has almost free licence to effect her revenge except that with the arrival of her roommates Patty and Terry, her rage is somewhat tempered.

Despite a technical slip in the first act, which left the actors timid and tentative, the second act was both terrifying to watch and a marvel to experience. The action is overt but not overbearing. At the same time, the audience is delivered the ideology of the play through psychological subtleties.

The character Terry is the epitome of "the poor defenseless woman," and at first glance Patty is an overly rational scrutinizer. Yet these characters are expertly transformed by the playwright into a variety of roles. Mastro Simone creates a psychic trial in which "characters shift . . . and become plaintiff defendant, prosecutor, judge, jury, witness . . ." Stern has done a very adequate job in bringing these subtleties into the minds of the audience.

It's true what the author of this play says, "A woman alone, a man enters, the play begins. From the very first we see a contagion of violence pass from Raul, to Marjorie, to Terry, to Patricia. It grows in the language and in the action like a germ culture. The monster in all of us is just under the skin. Scratch the skin deep enough and it comes leaping out full blown."

The performances of Hogan and Morelli are not to be missed. Hogan

aply carries an air of tension through over an hour and a half of utter hell. She is forced to be strong, frightened, angry, and pensive, all at the same time—as well as sustain the actual brutality of stage performance.

Morelli's job is no easier. For three-fourths of the performance he is bound, blindfolded, and immobilized. His voice is his only defense. He must be the one who is violent and strong at the outset only to be reduced to a feeble, childlike ambassador of shame and pity by the end.

Offstage, Morelli is "really a very sweet and kind of charming guy . . . getting Robert into his role wasn't easy," Stern said.

The conclusion of the play leaves the audience in a lurch. Raul notes that "wasps leave no stingers . . . they just keep on stinging," inferring that rapists are rarely convicted.

Marjorie has to some extent avenged her attack, but "in order to survive Raul, Marjorie has to become like Raul. To do that is to lose herself," Mastro Simone wrote. This she has done. Yet according to Stern, "there is really no resolve" since Marjorie has to convince the legal system.

Stern is "very pleased" with the play, so far. "I'm very proud of the actors, it's a very demanding and tiring show," she said.

Performances run from Tuesdays to Thursdays, plus on weekends at 8:00 p.m. There is an added matinee at 2 p.m. every Sunday. For tickets call the theatre at 630-6752, or BASS.

The program contains a warning: "Coarse language and violence may be offensive to some." For those willing to confront the reality of rape, *Extremities* offers an honest perspective worth considering.

Theatre Department tackles black comedy

Play proves suicide is funny

By STAN KLICH

Comedy is not usually associated with suicide, but next week (Feb. 10-13) York's Theatre Department will make an exception with their presentation of Nikolai Erdman's black comedy *The Suicide*.

Involving an extensive cast of 21, with fourth year theatre students playing the lead roles, *The Suicide* not only has an interesting plot, but the history of the play itself is filled with intrigue.

Written at a time of great political change in the USSR in 1928, Erdman's play examines the effect these changes wrought on the ordinary person. *The Suicide* takes place during this period of political and social upheaval in which the feudal society of the Russians is being replaced by the socialist regime of the new government.

The principal character Semyon Semyonovich Podsekalknikov is, like many other Russians, a victim of the soaring unemployment of the period. Unable to find work, the temperament of Semyon's household is volatile, and in an argument that he has with his wife, Semyon expresses his inability to remedy the situation by satirically mentioning suicide.

Although he has no immediate plans to kill himself the remark he makes is misinterpreted by his wife and when the whereabouts of Semyon becomes questionable, his wife assumes that he has gone to commit suicide.

Semyon, who sees his wife's suspicion, decides to get back at her by pretending he really is going to kill himself. To his surprise the community supports him, and the comedic aspect of suicide begins.

The Suicide was banned during its initial rehearsal by Stalin's censor board in 1932, and has never been performed or published in Russia since. Erdman's history as a playwright came to an abrupt end after



SUICIDE IS PAINLESS: Cast members of *The Suicide* hope that their production will have people killing themselves with laughter.

he was exiled to Siberia for three years. *The Suicide* was his second last play and although he may have written a third called *Liberation of Laughter* no script of that play exists.

The original script of *The Suicide* was never found, but a German translation was made from a Russian script and after performances in Zurich in 1970 and Frankfurt in 1971 it was translated into English. The play was produced in Toronto by Theatre Compact in 1976 and by the Shaw Festival in 1981.

The script for this production has been a collaborative effort on the part of director Ines Buchli who, with help of Russian student Yanina Gostsulsky, has used the Russian script to bring out elements missing in the English translation. Buchli has also tried to capture the unique style of the original production by making this production very large to bring out the culture of the Russian people.

Having recently directed *Mr. Nice Guy* at the Toronto Free Theatre, Buchli commented on the impor-

tance of *The Suicide* in terms of expressing to the York community what the Theatre Department is about. "There are about 100 people involved (in this production), and we work like dogs.

Buchli also stressed the importance of the play in educating as well as entertaining its audience by drawing comparisons between the high unemployment rates of today and how people are effected by them. "It's a comedy that people will walk away thinking about," she said.

York's Theatre Department has staged *The Suicide* in a very grand and professional manner. To achieve this, different departments of the university, such as the Music, Dance and Social Science departments have been utilized to bring out the characteristics of the Russian culture of the late 1920s.

The efforts of the Theatre Department in producing *The Suicide* are clear, and hopefully they will be rewarded with lots of laughs that will reflect the seriousness of the satire in the play.



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