

Awkward stumble through flimsy play

PAUL PIVATO

The media blurb for *American Days* reads: "Not a play to be staged at a record industry convention." In fact, it should not be staged anywhere. Currently showing at the Poor Alex Theatre, *American Days* is a dull, flimsy play that stumbles along without any sense of purpose or direction.

Set in a London recording studio, the play concerns three young musicians who have been invited to meet with the executive of a multinational record conglomerate. The executive, a bizarre American named Sherman, wears yellow socks and skips across the studio while speaking on the telephone. Played by Andrew J. Paterson, lead singer and guitarist of "The Government", Sherman holds an audition to determine which musician has star potential. Sherman's twitching eyes and impish grin, funny at first, soon become insufferable. Hopefully Paterson's foray into the world of theatre will be brief.

The three musicians, like the audience, begin to get confused and uncomfortable. Sherman orders

punk rocker Gary to be outrageous. Played by Simon Nine of "Rent Boys Inc.", another musician-cum-actor, Gary fails to shock the record tycoon with a passionate kiss and an obscene rendition of "Hey Jude". Tallulah, acted by York theatre graduate, Siobhan McCormick, also fails to win Sherman's approval. However Lorraine (Emma Hewitt), a drab and talentless singer, is chosen by Sherman as the new *wunderkid* for his stable of stars.

Yet from the time Sherman first meets the musicians until he finally selects Lorraine, *American Days* flounders about aimlessly. Why director Jon Michaelson cast two Toronto musicians in lead roles is perplexing. The script, by Stephen Poliakoff, sags throughout with flat humour and tedious digressions. At key moments, the dialogue falls to pieces in the most absurd manner. When Tallulah is rejected, something (known only to the playwright), moves her to ask Sherman if he is married. "Yes," says Sherman. So what? wonders the audience. The action, like the dialogue, is tangled and awkward. At

one point Sherman grabs Lorraine in what appears to be an embrace. But Lorraine asks him to stop hurting her.

Buried within the muddled script are interesting themes of media manipulation and seduction, but Poliakoff only touches on them in a heavy-handed and careless fashion. The characters toss out lumpish lines such as "He's exploiting us"

and "There's no method in this business". Evidently there is none in the play either.

Midway through *American Days*, a burned out rock star named Murray shows up, apparently a "victim" of the media. Played by David Perlman, Murray looks and acts like a stagehand who refused to leave the set during intermission. He lumbers about the stage with a

brooding solemnity that is unintentionally hilarious, delivering some of the worst lines in the play.

Typical of the shabby production was one scene when Sherman, in his London studio, turns on the television and the audience learns that the Maple Leafs have just scored. Sherman quickly shuts it off, but as the play continues, one wishes he had left the hockey game on.



American Days: No work and no play

Three new artists and old photographic processes

NIGEL TURNER

Once again three photographic artists--Vanessa Perry, Sam Garner and Jonas Tse--have teamed up and produced a photography show appropriately called *Why Not Again*, which will be at Calumet College gallery until Friday.

Two weeks ago the same three artists displayed some of the same pictures in another show entitled *Not Again*. The new show, like the last one, contains recurring themes for which the artists are well known--Garner and his nudes, Tse's scenes of Paris and Perry's field scenes.

Garner enjoys working with the old non-silver processes because they are "almost antique". He takes many nude photos because, as he says, they are "the only way I can be expressive."

Tse prefers to go beyond the

actual photograph. He tries to "combine graphic design into photography or photography into graphic design." Another of his experiments uses a glass dry-plate photo surrounded by a stained glass window. At first the window seems to clash with the photo, but after a while (and a little wine) the effect grows on you.

"They were primarily for etching plates," says Perry in defense of her many field photos. Rather than playing around with various images she has experimented with the material on which the prints are made, for example she used 100 per cent cotton, textured Indian cotton, coruroy, and other fabrics.

Tse said that if they put on another show it will be called *Never Again*, which would be followed by *Never Say Never Again*.

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