



TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' "THE TWO CHARACTER PLAY"

Theatre Rhinoceros, America's longest running professional queer theatre presented the little produced Tennessee Williams drama "The Two-Character Play" at the Eureka that closed on January 15th at the Eureka Theatre. "The Two Character Play" opened at the Hampstead Theatre in London in 1967, 20 years after "A Streetcar Named Desire". This bizarre discombobulating piece about a brother and sister who half act out a play about a brother and sister met with mixed reviews. The play was redrafted as "Out Cry" and died a death in New York and was then rewritten again in 1976 as "The Two Character Play. John Fisher directed the new version with two excellent actors playing the brother and sister.

Felice (Ryan Tasker) the brother and Clare (Alexandra Creighton), the sister is playing in a small touring company in a deep Southern Town after a series of big-time failures. The couple find themselves stranded in a rundown old theatre, broke and abandoned by their fellow actors. Struck with each other on a strange set with an audience demanding to be entertained, Felice and Clare begin to perform "The Two Character Play", a work by Felice that Clare loathes because it forces her to confront real-life terrors. The play within the play is about two penniless persons who have an irrational fear of public open spaces after witnessing their parents' grisly deaths. There is also a hint of incest between this brother and sister.

Tennessee Williams' drama is reminiscent of Jean Paul Sartre's "No Exit" with a little bit of "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" thrown in for good measure. The script is rambling and sometimes muddled as it worked out its complex representation on one personality splitting into two and then two more in a play within a play. The actors dip and out of the performance, sometimes rushing over the dialogue of the play within the play by the sister hitting a key on a piano that is located on stage. Sometimes it becomes increasing difficult to differentiate the actors from the characters and reality from illusion. However the confusion is interesting and is was moving portrait of the confused state of the playwright's mind in those despairing years. Actually the playwright was committed to a mental institution in 1969 by his brother Dakin.

John Fisher directed the play with delicacy and Ryan Tasker and Alexandra Creighton are well cast in this one hour and 40 minute play. Alexandra Creighton gives a touching performance as the spaced-out and unfocussed Clare. Ryan Tasker gives the dialogue a rich verbal delivery it demands. Gilbert Johnson's aptly cluttered theatrical set which includes a Elizabethan throne and a large painting of the face of man that might have been in George Orwell's *1984*. Rover Spotts' lighting uses portentously darkening lights along with Kai Morrison's ethereal taped score are a great asset to this production.

The Two Character Play closed on January 15th at the Eureka Theatre, 215 Jackson Street, San Francisco.

Wednesday, January 25, 2012

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