

'Three by Tennessee': superb performances

'Three By Tennessee,' three plays written by Tennessee Williams, each directed by Max Reagan and presented by Provincetown Theatre Company at the Provincetown Academy of Performing Arts and Museum, Commercial St., Provincetown with performances April 7 - 10, 8 pm. For reservations: 287-2400.

THEATRE

It could be debated that Tennessee Williams was the greatest misogynist ever to be birthed by a woman. It could also be argued that the Southern son had a gift for dissecting the female psyche and exposing the universal fears and frailties of the so-called "weaker sex."

However this is not the place for a treatise on Tennessee Williams' motives or abilities. It is the time for hailing the six actors who are executing three of Williams' early works at Provincetown Theatre Company under the subtle direction of Max Reagan. Across-the-board superb performances.

Aptly called "Three By Tennessee," the under two-hour production is comprised of three short plays. "Hello from Bertha" is about a dying prostitute fighting paranoia and delusions of unrequited love. "Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen" exposes a romantic and passionate woman torn between leaving her drunken, hedonistic lover and remaining in the emotionally-unfulfilling sexually-based relationship. Finally, "27 Wagons Full of Cotton" introduces a humorous side of Williams, but as one theatre goer put it, the humor makes you that much more vulnerable when the play takes a dark and violent twist.

It would be easy for a director/set designer to fall into the trap of emphasizing the dark, depressing aspects of Williams. But Reagan instead visually paints a pretty picture. The stage, painted an egg-shell white, is angled and three-tiered. The first play, "Hello From Bertha," takes place on the second tier, while the two members of the second play are already in character and positioned on the third tier. The simple set and costumes of "Bertha" are all creams, golds and whites. "Rain" is cream with rich accents of royal blue. Delicate differences keep the two plays separate while shar-



Left to right: Sandra Busa, Kevin Shenk and Sandy McGinn in 'Hello from Bertha'

and whites. "Rain" is cream with rich accents of royal blue. Delicate differences keep the two plays separate while sharing ultimately the same stage.

A brilliant and inventive directorial decision was to allow several Billie Holliday blues numbers to be played in their entirety while characters, caught in steamy, sultry summer environments, go about the ordinary business of slowly fanning themselves, wiping sweat from brows, or stretching in bed. The soulful melodies orchestrate a sense of slow motion and the haunting lyrics of women in heart-wrenching pain seem custom-made for Williams.

As Bertha, Sandy McGinn captures the essence of a person drifting in and out of reality because of physical illness and mental torment. It was all there: the anger and hysterical laughter of a paranoid, the tortured guilt of a prostitute, the innocence and pain of severed first love.

Sandra Busa emotes a handsome stage presence as Goldie the classy madame of the East St. Louis bordello and Kevin

Left to right: Sandra Busa, Kevin Shenk and Sandy McGinn in 'Hello from Bertha'

Shenk makes what is basically a bit part interesting to watch, particularly with her non-verbal gestures.

Always appearing taller on stage than her 5'5," Judith Provost is a striking composition in royal blue silk kamono and flowing black hair. As Woman, she uses a Japanese fan more in attempt to brush away her burdens than finding relief in the sweltering mid-town Manhattan room she shares with Man whose cocky and insincere nature is realized by Hal Streib.

While Bertha and Flora ("27 Wagons") are characters who have great range, Provost is somewhat handicapped by having to portray a formerly passionate woman whose lost hopes have drained her zest. She's tired and just wants to escape.

The lines of this play read much like a Beat poem: Woman says "It is the season of the rain, rain, rain." Man echoes a solitary "rain." None-the-less Provost and Streib conquer the lackluster and tedious script to successfully portray two lost souls wishing to rise above the emptiness of life, but who inevitably will fall back -- usually into each others' arms.

Kevin Shenk, a mature actress, is adorable and endearing as the cherubic, chubby, ticklish and innocent Flora aka Baby Doll in the deceptively humorous "27 Wagons Full of Cotton." Burying her chin in her soft shoulder or clutching her white kid glove, Flora tugs at our heartstrings. We don't want anything to happen to this child-woman whose biggest request is acquiring an ice-cold Coke.

But bad things do happen to nice people and at the hands of her unscrupulous husband and evil neighbor, Babe is unwitting and hurt -- physically, emotionally, spiritually. An engaging actress, Shenk traps us. We become as vulnerable as Babe. The infantile happy chatter matures to nervous giggles to gut-wrenching cries and finally, to full-ripened silence of a woman stripped of innocence and dignity.

Jim Forsberg infuses the nasty older husband with the

flavor of an almost foot-dragging, aw-shucks kind of backwoods farmer. Hal Streib creates a powerful presence as a deceitful, manipulative and sexually violent plantation owner who has his own interpretation of the "good neighbor policy."

Politics aside, Williams does provide powerful vehicles for women to undertake. These actors have taken up the gauntlet and are running with it -- but unfortunately, for only one more weekend. ■

— Claire McCarthy

P.A.P.A./PROVINCETOWN THEATRE COMPANY

PROVINCETOWN THEATRE COMPANY newsletter

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Three by Tennessee completes run

"Across-the-board superb performances" wrote Claire McCarthy in the Barnstable Register. "Jim Forsberg infuses the nasty husband with the flavor of a backwoods farmer. Sandra Busa emotes a handsome stage presence as the classy madam of the St. Louis bordello." Hamilton Kahn in the Cape Codder : "Hal Streib contributes a commanding performance as a proud, macho man bent on revenge. Kevin Shenk paints an arresting portrait of an intellectually simple but emotionally complex woman. Sandy McGinn gives a moving performance as a delirious, dying prostitute." Alison Blake in the Cape Cod Times : "Judith Provost is ethereal, beautiful and compelling as a woman seeking an escape from a relationship exhausted by disappointment." The production, the final one of the PTC's 25th Anniversary season, recently completed an eight-performance limited run, playing to excellent houses and bringing the season to a successful conclusion. The director wishes to thank all those who contributed to the production, and especially thanks the six actors for their hard work.

Moving Day

No, don't panic. It's all over! A two-man crew, assisted by PTC members Kevin Shenk, Pat Bruno, Max Reagan and Noah Shenk, recently completed the unenviable task of moving the company out of the Provincetown Art Association and into its various storage locations until October. Pizza was shared, spirituals were sung, and a fine time was had by all. We hope to see a few more volunteers when October comes around!

Bits and Pieces

Our vice-president, Thom Dutton, handed in his resignation notice recently. We wish to thank him for his efforts on the PTC's behalf this season and wish him well on any future projects that come his way. With current board members Pat Bruno and Max Reagan stepping down next fall, this leaves several board positions vacant. So if you've been entertaining any notions of taking a position on the board, this just might be your chance the board is still accepting proposals for next season congratulations to Kevin Shenk, PTC president, who was recently crowned "Troupier of the Year" for her contributions to our 25th Anniversary season. Anna Duart, costumer and props person extraordinaire, was named Miss Congeniality the PTC workshop still meets every Thursday at 3:00 p.m. at the Community Center.