

Gay abandon

Unity Fest 2001 Program B

The Fourth Unity

Bank Street Theatre

155 Bank Street (212) 358-3557

Equity showcase (closes Dec. 30)

Review by Arlene McKanic

If there were any doubts that a woman could be as narcissistic, obnoxious, and boob-obsessed as certain kinds of men, **Bekka Lindstrom**'s bravura performance as Sylvia in **Lisa Haas**'s *Stacked: A Deviant Doctoral Dissertation* shattered them utterly. Dressed in cargo pants and a matching cap, she leapt around and hollered in a library, danced with a wheelie full of her monstrous gazillion-page dissertation -- she swears it's a "chick magnet" -- and left the audience sick with laughter. *Stacked*, directed with insane happiness by **James McLaughlin**, was one of six short plays featured in Unity Fest 2001, a program of short plays that examine modern gay life in ways both funny and serious.

The evening began with **Robin Rice Lichtig**'s *St. Anthony and the Appendix*, also directed by McLaughlin, where a snipped-out appendix stands as a metaphor for the dangers of denial, specifically a crazy-making Mom (**Ann Chandler**)'s denial of her son Wally's coming to adulthood; she's so deluded she thinks he's 15 instead of 21. Rounding out the cast were **Leila Mansury** as a crisp Sister Salvation, **Frank Anthony Polito** as Wally, sweet in his Calvin Klein skivvies and hospital johnny, and **Tony Hamilton** as Bob, Wally's lover, who proves to be nearly as suffocating as his Mom.

Linda Eisenstein's *F2F*, directed by **Donna Jean Fogel**, is a bright, short piece about the attraction of a writer (**Gisele Richardson**) to a beautiful but straight woman, and resonated with those who have ever fallen for someone they can't have.

In **Peter Mercurio**'s *Refreshments*, directed by **Brenda D. Cook**, a meeting between two guppies (**John Jay Buol** and **Tony Hamilton**) at a New Year's Eve party deteriorates into the part of Scott, played with wonderful screechiness by Hamilton.

The experimental *Not Exactly Strangers*, by **Andres J. Wrath**, also directed by Cook, is a dreamy, sorrowful meditation on the wreckage of a relationship where the lovers (**Ivan Davila** and **Christopher Lawrence Kann**) simply can't reach each other.

The remarkable *Blow* by **Chay Yew**, directed by **Dennis Smith**, deals with alienation on several levels. The young Hmong man played by **Steven Eng** is alienated from American culture (his template for living is *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*) by being an Asian immigrant, and alienated from the Hmong culture by, among other things, being gay. **Virginia Wing** was believable as his anxious, overworked mother, and **Keith Lorrel Manning** was the man who provides the work with a horrifying twist.

The festival's set design was by Bekka Lindstrom, which proved that she's a talented lady indeed, and in Program B it consisted of a stepped platform, which served as beds, sofas, chairs, and the floor of a library where the grandiose Sylvia imagines being ravished by Marian, the research librarian. The three arches behind it served as doors, windows, and niches. **Renee Molina**'s perfectly timed lighting captured the moods of the plays brilliantly. Sometimes the light was bright as a hospital room, or a spotlight picked out one

character while another was kept in contemplative shadow, or the light flared into the red of a gay club/inferno, or a baby spot slid from an anxious, hopeful face into darkness. **Patrick Wang**'s evocative sound used everything from snatches of Wagner and R&B tunes to birdsongs and the sound of surf. Unity Fest was a terrific night at the theater. One caveat though: the theater wasn't exactly at 155 Bank Street, which was the Westbank Theater, but further down, through a large courtyard.>

[Box Score:](#)

Writing: 2

Directing: 2

Acting: 2

Sets: 1

Costumes: 1

Lighting/Sound: 2

Return to [Volume Eight, Number seventeen](#) Index

Return to [Volume Eight](#) Index

Return to [Home Page](#)

Copyright 2001 Arlene McKanic