

E pluribus gay

Unity Fest. Program C

The Fourth Unity

Bank Street Theatre

155 Bank Street (358-3557)

Equity showcase (closes Dec. 30)

Review by David Mackler

Good acting and directing were the keys to Program C of the 4th Unity's 2001 Unity Fest. Some of the short plays worked better than others (ain't that always the way?), but all were well-thought-out, well-staged, well-acted.

Gary Garrison's comic *Rug Store Cowboy* (directed by **Courtenay A. Wendell**) put the new-in-town-new-on-the-job Bradley (**Tony Hamilton**) up against the cowboy Nolan (**James McLaughlin**), who has a novel way of testing out a rug. The innuendo flew fast and furious, most of it over Bradley's head, but with very good humor and a terrific performance by Hamilton, as Bradley comes bursting out of his shell. A farcical and unserious delight.

Alternating scenes of the past and present tell Margaret's story in **Amy A. Kirk's** *Evergreen*. How roles and perspectives change from their days at Camp Evergreen to life as it is now was beautifully delineated in the writing and direction of **Bekka Lindström**, and the performances of **Donna Jean Fogel** as Margaret and Courtenay A. Wendell as Colette, the object of her youthful affection. Time is not everyone's friend, and there was tremendous satisfaction in seeing Margaret sure and mature, with their roles reversed, as they play the word game they played at camp. *Brava.*

Anton Dudley's *Pick-Up Lines* was a comedy of miscommunication -- the kind that is more than possible at a disco with loud music. The non-sequiturs flow fast and free as a pick-up nearly goes awry. Courtney A. Wendell again guided her actors (**Michael Rivera** and **Nicholas Warren-Gray**) into lighthearted fun. The way **Rich Orloff** works his theme in *Class Dismissed* is somewhat better than the story itself. A college professor is packing his stuff, having been fired for an affair with a former student. But Gene teaches religion, and the dialogue about reason, logic, and love scores a little higher than the putative matter at hand. And a small item, like an office stapler, comes to be both an ethics lesson and a gesture of love. **Keith Lorrel Manning** and **Frank Anthony Polito** brought an abundance of real feeling to their parts under Donna Jean Fogel's direction.

Kim Yaged's *Never Said* revels in the joys of female masturbation, bisexuality, answering machines, and actors in their underwear. **Hope Lambert** was earnest and funny as the woman fending off an old boyfriend (**John Jay Buol**), an old girlfriend (Bekka Lindström), and a bar pickup who's as peppy as a puppy dog (Ivan Davila). The set-up wasn't as important as the playing, and everyone struck the right tone under Anton Dudley's direction.

Chay Yew's *White* (also directed by Dudley) was a downbeat end to the production, but for a short piece it packed quite a punch in its writing and playing -- **Patrick Wang** had the stage to himself, but it was crowded with his secret life at the bathhouse, his desires, and his self-loathing. The writing was somewhat formal, as if Wang was reading a story as he acted it out, but even though the subject was slightly familiar (older, unattractive man unwanted by the younger "swans"), it was quite powerful.

Bekka Lindström designed a set that effectively had two playing areas -- the foreground bright with a pattern

of pinkish diamonds, and a series of arches, which meant the darker upstage could function as the subconscious, or simply a visible off-stage area (it was used to great effect for *Evergreen* and *Never Said*.) Lighting effects (design by **Renée Molina**) highlighted the upstage in color or focused attention as needed, and sound design (Patrick Wang) worked particularly well in *Pick-Up Lines* and *Never Said*. The costumes, credited to the company, featured outfits that included red and green. While this was most likely a tribute to the season, it also worked thematically in *Evergreen*, where Margaret, whose life is charging ahead, wore a green sweater, while Colette, whose life has stalled, wore red. Reading too much symbolism into a collection of short plays? Ah, but that's why they call it Art.

[Box Score](#):

Writing: 1

Directing: 2

Acting: 2

Sets: 2

Costumes: 1

Lighting/Sound: 1

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