

Come Closer

You're Smothering Me

COME CLOSER YOU'RE SMOTHERING ME

Written and Directed by Stan Edelson

Caravan Theatre

Ronald

Liz

Chris

Jamie

David Starr Klein

Anne Barclay

Peter Kowner

Barbara Fleischmann

BY CAROLYN CLAY

I might bill *Come Closer You're Smothering Me* as a "How To Make a Woman" afterthought, or perhaps an aftertaste--sickly sweet, redundant and disappointing. The Caravan Theatre's newest original work is, I'm afraid, not very original and only sporadically entertaining. While the program proclaims that "Commitment is a complex word/No simple answers can be given/To people questioning/Why they are together," the play is mostly drivel and certainly as McKuenesque as the program note. The "Life as an Identity-Sucking Marry-Go-Round" image is certainly nothing new, and, true to their words, the people at Caravan merely scratch at its cliché-ridden surface without offering any answers. Simple or Complex (except maybe separate vacations). And in the end, everyone winds up riding the same old horse for better or worse.

Come Closer You're Smothering Me focuses on two marriages in crisis, both because one partner is more dependent than the other on the other. Ronald is a restless city planner, Liz is his doting Wife, and Jamie and Chris (note the unisex names) are two younger, freer spirits. (They fart at the dinner table.) Unfortunately, Jamie is somewhat freer than Chris who is, at heart, just a chip off the old-fashioned block and wants a girl just like the girl who married it. Anyway, the city planner wants to be a sailor, his wife wants him to be a full time lover and husband.

Jamie wants to be Jamie, and Chris wants her to be Mrs. Chris. Familiar? Terribly. Inevitably, the couples hash out their differing dreams and expectations. Ronald finds a companion in Chris (who gives him a book of his poems), Jamie performs some consciousness-raising on Housewife Liz, and everybody splits, presumably to come to grips with their individual aloneness and come together again whole.

But the failing of *Come Closer You're Smothering Me* is not that the premise is simplistic. Hell, Arthur Miller wrote a fine drama about selling old furniture! But little is done to theatricalize or to shed new insight on the by now familiar adages. ("How can we make it together? Should we?") The development is slow and very nearly horizontal. The language is pedestrian and the imagery banal. ("I am alone now/I can think without hearing an echo./ I can break one of my own pots/And clean it up later./I am alone now and its okay." And the style is so randomly improvisational that one questions the existence of a script, especially during those dead halts while the various characters create their own things out of the straight-backed chairs which comprise the set.) Maybe its just an encounter session, and You Are There.

In all fairness to Stan Edelson and his highly competent company, there are some delightful, surprising bits and pieces to this unsatisfactory work. I especially liked the city planner's elaborate power-fantasies (diagrams included, of course) wherein he reigns at the center of a giant, highly workable cloverleaf. And the literal treatment of hackneyed images is novel and hilarious. (Chris is reduced by Jamie's leavetaking to a mere speck which Ronald picks up and engages in conversation. The "speck" then delivers a squeaky indictment of bitchy women that had me on the floor. When Chris swallows an imaginary Jamie on which he has been executing a standardized "possessiveness test" he finds that he cannot open his mouth, even with clenched teeth, to say, "Hello, I'm Christopher" without his wife's voice screeching, "JAMIE!!!")

The Caravan company is a fine one, very creative and constructively dedicated to both male and female liberation. But they have broken no new ground with *Come Closer*

You're Smothering Me. So unless you are the kind of person who takes some kind of comfort from public confirmation that your laundry is no dirtier and no duller than everyone else's, I would recommend an evening at home with a stack of Rod McKuen records (the kind with the crashing surf in the background) and the "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" column from the Ladies Home Journal.

BAD
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