

ENTERTAINMENT

The artist's dilemma

by Jay Brown

When Nyla McCarthy walked into **Just Out's** office, I had Brand X Daily spread out on my desk.

"Did you read what [Brand X Daily's reviewer] wrote?" she exclaimed.

I hadn't read it yet, but I did as Nyla sat on a stool in front of me. He wasn't kind. And, even though he and I saw *Plenty* on the same night, I really wondered if we had seen the same play.

I have to thank him though; he provided the perfect opening to our interview.

"I've wanted to do *Plenty* for three years. I was working a lot with the Production Company then and Peter Fornara was going to direct me in it. But we couldn't get the rights," Nyla began.

When she heard that ART was going to produce *Plenty* this year, Nyla knew that she had another chance to play Susan. She knew she was the only one to do the part.

"I had to audition for it. I knew that I understood Susan; that I had an understanding of what she was all about better than anyone. Why she was the way she was. And I did research on diplomatic wives and understood her fear of being perfect."

Nyla McCarthy has been acting professionally since the mid-seventies. She began her career with the Oregon Repertory Theatre in Eugene and toured with that company for a year during the U.S. bicentennial celebration, for which the company had been awarded a grant by the U.S. Bicentennial Commission.

More touring lay in store for her after she landed a job with the Antique Festival Theatre. "The oldest professional touring theatre in the United States," Nyla said. "It's a sort of collective, based in Idaho. We were together all the time for 18 months. It was a good experience. And I made lots of money to be an actress."

When the Antique Festival Theatre job ended, Nyla took a vacation in Europe. Upon her return in 1978, she settled in Portland and for the next three years was associated with the Production Company.

"Some people think that theatre isn't really a noble thing to be doing, but it gives people a vicarious reality. There are many important



photo by Rick Adams

Plenty.

things that I want people to hear. I believe in light; I believe that bureaucracy, greed and power are the forces of dark."

When the Production Company disbanded, Nyla took off for a year in San Francisco but came back to Portland "because it was too expensive." Then she decided to have a child.

"I want to be a mother for awhile. I wanted to create a positive being out of my own body. Now I have a child to support and I want to do it with theatre. I just want to pay the rent and eat — is that too much to ask? So I work full time at another job; I'm a housing coordinator with Mental Health."

During the past year Nyla appeared in two plays directed by Melida Pittman, *Bits and Pieces* and Pittman's own *Atlantis*. "Atlantis was a wonderful idea. But people were cruel about it; they gave no credit for trying. Melinda was really devastated and will take a long time to come back."

Then she "got hooked again" on *Plenty*. There is a kinesthetic energy flow that happens in theatre — a chain that happens with the audience. When theatre magic works it's like an orgasm. And there is a lot of good theatre in Portland."

Nyla said that although some people think she's "real serious, I want to do comedy. I don't feel I am a 'type' — even though I do play mad women or wounded women well. I

even played a man in a couple of shows. I can look really androgynous if I choose to."

"I love people — all people. Particularly I believe that women are really stronger than history has let us be. I am a humanist. I live alone. I'm a single parent. An '80s super woman."

Look for Nyla McCarthy, super actress as well as superwoman, in a motion picture currently in the works in Portland. The film, directed by Gus Van Sant, is based on Walt Curtis' *Mala Noche*.

In the meantime, *Plenty* continues at the YWCA through October 13. And early next year Nyla will be appearing in another ART production, *Hill House*, an adaptation of Shirley Jackson's supernatural thriller *The Haunting of Hill House*.

In review

"If you can keep your head
When all about you
Are losing theirs
And blaming it on you . . ."

These lines from Rudyard Kipling's "If" may explain the quandary faced by the protagonist of David Hare's *Plenty*.

Susan Traherne, at 17, was a member of the French Resistance during World War II. For the next eighteen years she attempts to preserve the innocence intrinsic to her war experience as the world around her slides into hypocrisy and duplicity. In a world of plenty, Susan Traherne's survival requires nothing but the innocence of pure feeling. "I didn't think," she says, "I only felt."

As Susan learns that innocence is a despised quantity in the world she inhabits, she becomes more and more alienated until she appears to lose all contact with that world. She is, of course, perceived as "mad" by the defenders of the prevailing order. She finds that preserving innocence is an extremely difficult task; surviving the Nazis in World War II was one thing, but survival in the postwar world is another game altogether.

Plenty is a very simple story — 18 years in a woman's life. And yet, *Plenty*, like the bulk of British popular fiction is also social commentary. I hesitate to say *Plenty* is an allegory, but Susan Traherne does seem to personify Britain at her "finest hour" and in the postwar era as Britain dismantled her empire.

As Susan Traherne, Nyla McCarthy displays an awesome ability to shift mood, sensuous, innocent, mad. Her luminous eyes express volumes as they shift and dart. McCarthy is wonderful to watch.

Marilyn Stacey plays Alice Susan's sometimes lover, longtime friend. Alice is less complex than Susan; to Alice, pure feeling equals lust. But lust comes to her after a while.

Stacey plays Alice as the perfect foil to Susan's mood changes; she's there steady as a rock.

Plenty, directed by Rebecca Adams, is a cornucopia of fine acting talent. Arthur Harold is wonderful as Sir Leonard Darwin, a diplomat's diplomat; Joseph R. Cronin as Brock, Susan's husband and consular official, perfectly embodies the cynical Englishman.

In smaller roles, but no less outstanding, are David Beetham-Gomes, Tim Streeter, Michele M. Fulves, Jeffery Brownson, Lee Forest and Jordana Sardo.

And, as Mme. Wong, Linda Schneider is a perfect jewel.

See *Plenty* and you will see plenty; it's a theatre experience not to be missed.

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