

Looking into Blue Window

by E. Jane Westlake

Oftentimes I catch myself believing as I step into a theatre house that I will not see anything new or innovative. Heck, I think, we're post-Samuel Beckett babies; what haven't we seen? Most often, I am surprised to experience new images and new words. It is surprising to me, too, then, that a major point of discussion within *Blue Window* was the very uniqueness of human experience. I thought of all of us sitting there, watching and listening to this play by Craig Lucas, a new play, with new ideas, and all of us different people, perceiving this in new and different ways.

To reduce this script now in a review to a basic plot is beyond my little, unique human ability. Complex relationships are woven together into even more complex relationships. Characters are trying to relate as lovers, as friends, and eventually in a large social situation. Much of the action takes place simultaneously in different settings to bring out parallels and contrasts within each set of relationships. Sometimes it is difficult to follow. It becomes the kind of performance piece that must be viewed several times to catch some subtleties.

Generally, the direction by Twig Webster,



Laurie Holland (left) and Marita Keyes in *Blue Window* at Storefront.

some brilliant jobs by the actors, and the flow of dialogue kept the audience from losing what was happening. Often, the flow of dialogue was semi-choral and things would be said in unison or echo in a haunting way. It

made me feel that although we are very different, maybe we are made of the same stuff, the same fears and dreams — as one character adamantly believed.

The alienation seemed to surface mostly

within each pair of lovers. There was a tremendous amount of non-communication between all of them. What I found interesting was that we are left with the feeling that the only homosexual couple, Alice and Boo, were the only ones who would work out their problems. Emily, a quiet character throughout, says that she wishes that everyone had a little window so that you could look into them and see what they were thinking and feeling. Alice and Boo seemed to be the only ones who did finally take a look into themselves and each other. They look together through the window that shows them what they are hoping for, how things should be, and they find each other walking along the Riviera or some such thing.

I thought the lesbian couple was treated rather well, considering how most of our contemporary playwrights tend to portray them as the token "messed up" couple. Samuel Beckett would have them drinking green tea together and discussing a man they had had in common. Lillian Hellman would have one shoot herself, and Jean-Paul Sartre would have them in hell.

Not much time left to see *Blue Window* as it runs until December 7th. It's enjoyable to watch and fun to listen to, not to mention thought-provoking.

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Mala Noche premieres

by W.C. McRae

After eight years in the making, Gus Van Sant's film *Mala Noche* premiered this month at the Northwest Film Study Center. Adapted from local poet and personality Walt Curtis' short story of the same name, *Mala Noche* is the story of a Portland Skid Row store clerk who falls hopelessly — and unrequitedly — in love with a young street Mexican. The clerk becomes involved instead with the object of his affection's best friend. Van Sant describes the film's theme as "our culture's relation to Mexican machismo — we Europeans have lost the 'warrior side' to our personalities." The film concludes ambivalently, questioning the sexual — and cultural — politics of the relationships.

In casting Johnny, the icon of the clerk's eye, Van Sant wanted to find a young man who would be as instantly attractive to the audience as he was to Walt, the clerk. But casting the two Mexican roles became a problem, not the least because of the gayness of the theme and the difficulty of obtaining parents' permission to cast a minor (Johnny is 16) in a part that would involve him as an unwilling object of gay desire. Local actor Tim Streeter was cast as Walt in an attempt (according to Van Sant) to make the obsessed clerk character more likeable and accessible. The result, while well-acted and enjoyable, lacks the dark drivenness — and forthright gayness — expected of a film from Curtis' story.

Van Sant wants to continue to make "Gay films speaking directly to gay audiences." He hopes that *Mala Noche* can find the same audience ("but more serious") as other ground-breaking gay films as *Taxi Zum Kio*, which Van Sant saw at the New York Gay Film Festival, and which served as the inspiration for his decision to make films for gay audiences along gay themes. *Mala Noche* will

play in the same film festival this January, and Van Sant hopes that it will have a commercial run in Portland later this winter.

Theatre of significance

by Jim Anctil

Dutchman, a play by Imamu Baraka (LeRoi Jones), is being performed in Portland. The importance of theatre of this type to the future of our community cannot be underestimated. *Dutchman* was first produced in New York in 1964. It was written by the poet and playwright then known as LeRoi Jones, who later changed his name.

The one-act play takes place entirely in the New York City subway ("the flying underbelly of the city") during a steaming hot summer. We are underground in more than one use of the word. Indeed, the New York subway in summer, as a friend used to describe it, is "a place where every sense faculty is thoroughly raped." The assault upon all the senses is undeniable. But let's face it, this is not a real place — it is the subway of the mind and/or of the body. And this becomes a metaphor which Jones uses on several levels to tap into our visceral and subliminal responses. The constant clickety-clack and screeching of the train wheels throughout the play is a recurring reminder of the role of technology in our lives. For we are dealing here with technology as power, sleekness and speed, as well as with all its sexual connotations. This is technology in its most dehumanizing (and dehumanized) form.

Dutchman is not a polite play nor a genteel entertainment — it is raw, adult, very direct, an uncompromising confrontation. In this context, "expose yourself to art" takes on another interpretation. For this one-act is a masterpiece of dramatic conciseness, yet it is filled with the ironies of artistic creation. The

action concerns two people who meet one evening in a subway car. The woman, Lula, (Jenny Ayres) immediately strikes up a conversation with the man Clay, (Gene Hughes). From the first words we see that these two are unable to deal with each other as discrete individuals, but only as the stereotypes of what the other expects. Clay is an educated and sensitive young Black man, well-mannered and middle-class. Lula is a rather mysterious white woman who seems only able to relate to Clay as the mythical Black male. The irony is that Clay at first tries to deny his own physicality, while Lula seems a personification of the repressed white person's body hunger driven mad by the mind. Each seeks the other for fulfillment, yet each is thwarted by his/her misconceptions. This is prejudice in its literal meaning — "pre-judging."

The title of the play can denote "something used to conceal faulty construction." What is true in the building trades is also true in society. Jones is indicating an artificial weakness, a tragic flaw in the social fabric. We are at a point now in the world where we had better come to terms with our ethnic and cultural diversity. Indeed, the unique hope of our society is to be seriously developing and making use of the talents of all its minorities, including women, blacks, hispanics, native Americans, Asian-Americans, and yes, even gay people. In a world which hovers on the brink of utter self-obliteration, it seems pretty obvious that there is something very faulty in the old construction. Jones perceives that we (each of us) need "them" just as much as "they" need us. This is simply because we can never be complete or healthy as long as we deny half of ourselves. The Mind and the Body must be in harmony, or one will destroy the other.

Dutchman continues at IFCC (5340 N. Interstate Ave., tel. 243-7930) through December with two other one-act plays by Ed Bullins and Adrienne Kennedy, as part of the PassinArt Festival.