

We'll still be here in the morning

The songs of Intimate Friends range from tear-jerking torch songs to hysterical satires; some expose the hypocrisy and prejudice of our own culture.

BY BRADY JENSEN

In the anthology *Gay Plays*, William Hoffman (author of *As Is*) makes a distinction between "gay plays" and "gay theater." Gay plays, he explains, are ones "whose central figure or figures are homosexual or one in which homosexuality is a main theme," while gay theater is a "production that implicitly or explicitly acknowledges that there are homo-

theatre

sexuals on both sides of the footlights." *Intimate Friends*, a new production which recently completed a lengthy run in Seattle, manages to excel as both a gay play and as a gay theater production. Seen in its second-to-last performance in Seattle in June, *Intimate Friends* provided a memorable night of song, dance, and adventure.

Intimate Friends is a musical revue, tagged a "celebration of gay and lesbian lifestyle." Twenty-four songs, six performers, three musicians, and a stylish, almost whimsical set form the elements of this rich and varied exploration of what it means to be gay today. There is no plot or story with action to advance; rather, each song is a miniature drama. The characters and stories are gay — they concern our hopes, fears, and experiences. The show is also a production of gay theater which explicitly states that there are, in fact, gays on and off stage. *Intimate Friends* is also just plain good, perhaps great, theater. Not "good for gay theater," but a solid, well-conceived and executed piece of legitimate theater.

The show is the child of New York emigre Miriam Moses, who wrote the music and lyrics for the entire production. Explaining her show, Moses states, "It starts from the premise that we are normal people. We look at our lives the same way straight people look at their lives. We feel the same emotions, dream the same dreams, have the same problems and reach for the same happiness. This show is an opportunity for gay people to experience a theater piece that has universal themes, but with the reality of homosexuality as the basis for those themes."

Moses explains that she wanted to give her audience "a chance for us to feel our own feelings and love who we really are." The songs which compose *Intimate Friends* accomplish this goal. They range from tear-jerking torch songs to hysterical satires. In some numbers, Moses exposes the hypocrisy and prejudice of our own culture. "She's One Helluva Guy" reminds us that the oft-maligned drag queens and the leather dykes whom "some sisters would rather not see" were, in fact, the first to arm the barricades for gay liberation.

Of course, prejudice and hypocrisy are

not confined to gay society. In the rousing, almost patriotic "The Military Song," the cast sings the praises of being gay and in the Army. I almost expected the flag to unfurl at the end of Act I, and considered enlisting on my way home. It is classic satire, definitely camp, and inside we all know that's the way it really is.

At its best, *Intimate Friends* picks up some very-familiar facets of gay life and blesses it with beauty and dignity. The show-stopper is "Rising With the Wind," sung with eloquence and grace by J. Stegar Thompson as a man dying, presumably from AIDS. Moses gives us a lyric which is both powerful and sensitive, without ever slipping into the maudlin. In fact, *Intimate Friends* never falls into precious sentimentality.

The cast demonstrates amazing versatility, the three men and three women perform in ensemble, in duets and trios, and solo numbers with equal skill. Each performer has several chances to shine in humorous and dramatic settings. Moses treats the audience to a tango, a soft-shoe number, a country scorcher, and more, and the cast consistently rises to each challenge. Under the direction of Peggy Shannon and choreographer Kate Allen, the cast really puts on a show with sparkle, warmth, and personality. *Intimate Friends* never fails to entertain.

I must confess, I had listened to a tape of *Intimate Friends* perhaps a dozen times before seeing the show. I knew my favorite songs literally by heart, and I was enthused and enchanted before I set foot in the theater. Once there, I got caught up in the excitement of seeing, for the first time, my experiences and feelings brought to life on the stage. Since that night, I have listened to this show perhaps a dozen dozen more times and it remains fresh and vibrant.

Intimate Friends is about more than lifestyle, it's about life, gay life. One reviewer in Seattle headlined a favorable notice with "A Plea for Acceptance." I fervently disagree. *Intimate Friends* never begs, never pleads for anything. It is honest and genuine, and audiences — gay or straight — can find in its simple melodies and ear-catching lyrics a large measure of the truth about what it is to be a gay man or lesbian.

The original cast of *Intimate Friends* will perform for two weekends only September 17-20 and September 24-27 in the Portland Center for the Performing Arts' new Delores Winningstad Theatre. An opening night gala will be held September 17 to benefit the Phoenix Rising Foundation.

Intimate Friends will be the first production in the new theatre. The cast will tour to Vancouver, B.C. following the Portland engagement.

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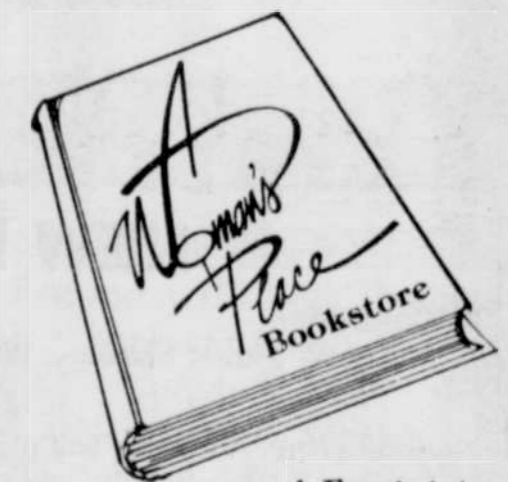


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