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A WISE REPRISE

Audiences are offered a second chance to see triangle productions!' lauded staging of Jeffrey

by C. Jay Wilson Jr.



Cast members of Jeffrey: (from left) Aaron Baas, Tim Delaney, Sarah Lucht, Michael Menger and Rob Buckmaster

Is there any one in Portland who hasn't heard of Jeffrey? If you missed triangle productions!' staging of Paul Rudnick's Obie award-winning play this winter, certainly you observed one of the advertisements that featured underwear-clad Rob Buckmaster reclining atop the bold block letters of the play's title. Perhaps you've seen the trailers for the major motion picture due to be released in September. (You may even have been lucky enough to catch

Theater

the special clandestine screening at this year's Oregon Gay and Lesbian Film Festival.) If you're still bemused, you've probably been cloistered in a small box or too engrossed in the O. J. Simpson judicial circus, but triangle productions! is giving you one more chance to catch a performance of Jeffrey this summer.

Due to the tremendous audience response to its production of Jeffrey earlier this year, the company opened a revival of the show on July 14 for a limited one-month run. The play, directed by Jon Kretzu, recently received five Drammy nominations and two well-deserved awards for supporting performances by Michael Mendelson and Sarah Lucht.

Jeffrey features Rob Buckmaster (in the title role) as a gay man in the age of AIDS who, disgusted with demystifying negotiations of safer sex, decides to give up sex completely—a decision that is immediately tested when he meets Steve (Michael Menger) at the gym. Jeffrey's consideration of his personal pact of celibacy ends with the knowledge that Steve is HIV positive and thus creates the central conflict of the play. The dialogue established between the audience and Jeffrey's consciousness is interrupted by a series of unrelated situations that serve to elucidate his emotional paralysis, and consequently bring to the stage an assortment of characters that parody many facets of gay life in the 1990s. Jeffrey's array of characters range from apparitions of Mother Theresa to the Lower Manhattan Gentlemen's Masturbation Society—all played by a highly en-

tertaining versatile ensemble of supporting actors.

Periodically appearing among these characters is Sterling, Jeffrey's best friend and unsolicited giver of advice, who systematically offers up a series of insolent one-liners—a continuous commentary on Jeffrey's dejected mood. Playwright Paul Rudnick created the role to ensure that as the play introduces a serious issue, it is counterbalanced with comedic insight. The part of Sterling is portrayed by Michael Mendelson, who deftly handles the character's sophistication with enough élan to shame the most pretentious interior designer.

In the supporting cast, acting her way through the play's more colorful characters, Sarah Lucht commands the stage whenever she sets foot upon it. A consummate performer, Lucht transforms the audience into believers as she assumes the role of Debra Moorhouse, a post-modern evangelist with the charismatic cure for the world's emotional maladies.

Jeffrey's strength is in its levity. Although the play concerns itself with rather serious issues, it never entertains them at length or with much depth, instead it grants the audience comic relief from life's stark realities. Rudnick never attempts to mirror life in Jeffrey, he merely attempts to shed a humorous light upon it with the hope of possibly illuminating some of life's absurdities—it is this lighthearted approach to life's difficulties that makes the play so enjoyable.

One could criticize the weak, superficial development of the relationship between Jeffrey and Steve (it is at best barely believable), but the ultimate believability of Jeffrey's characters was not of primary importance to Rudnick in composing the play. He allows us to see just enough of ourselves in the characters to unfold a simple moral lesson: Life should be lived and celebrated, not feared or lamented.

Jeffrey runs Thursday to Saturday through Aug. 12 at the Artists Repertory Theater, YWCA, 1111 SW 10th Ave., third floor. Tickets are \$15 and are available from Fastixx 224-8499, Jelly Bean card shop, Music Millennium and the triangle productions! box office 246-8967.