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BORED IN BED

*Triangle's Two Boys work hard, but the play's banality
leaves them naked and helpless*

by C. Jay Wilson Jr.

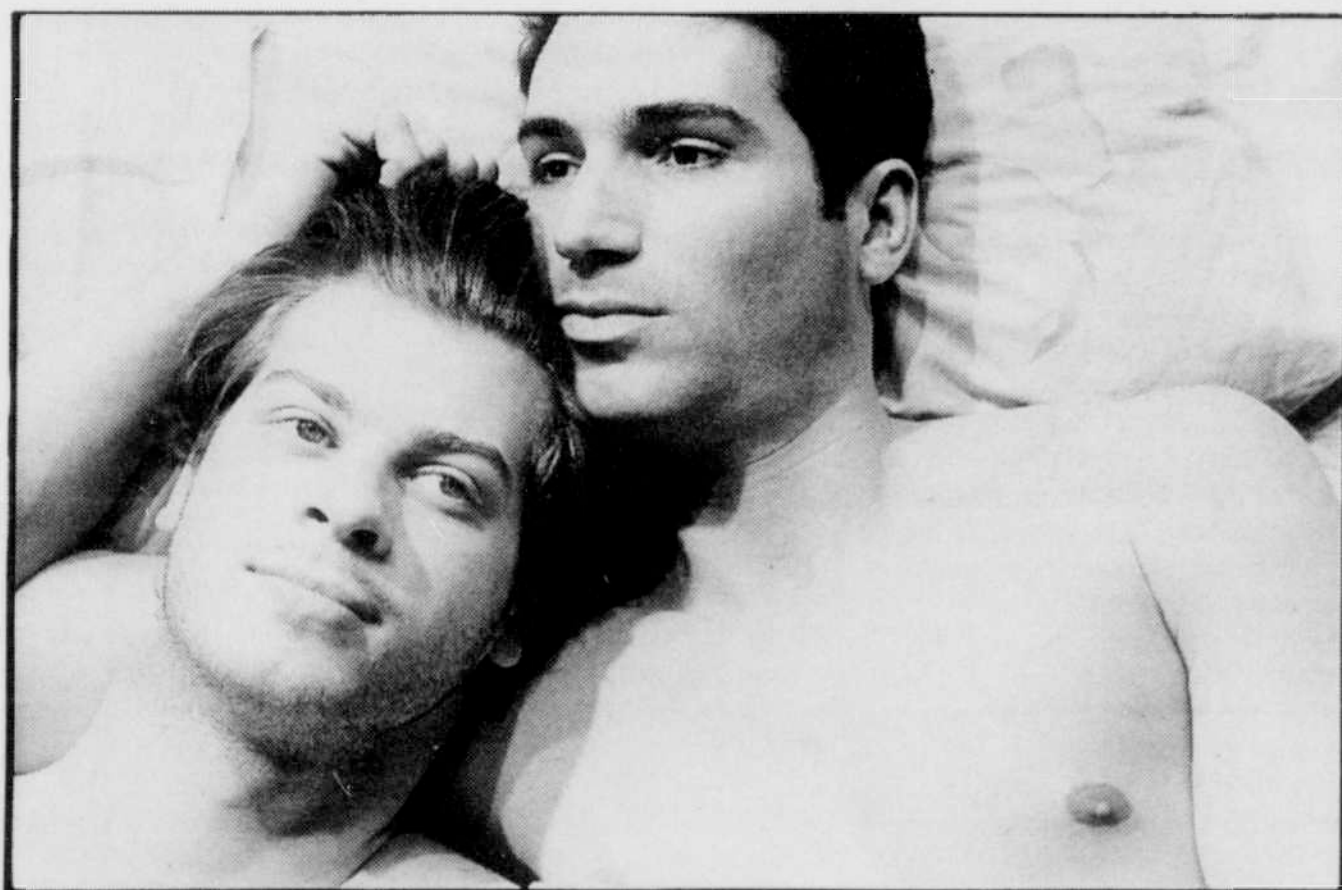
How can a theater company expect to sell out houses for a relatively unknown play written by an obscure playwright before the advantage of word-of-mouth has a chance to benefit ticket sales? It simply has to lure its audiences with the promise of full frontal nudity, and if its target audience is gay men, it'll have them practically beating down the doors to gain a seat at the voyeuristic spectacle.

Theater

A new wave of gay-themed theater has in the past few years unleashed a whole slew of productions that feature their casts in various states of undress. This *de rigueur* nudity is sometimes relevant to the development of the script—as in the multi-city smash *Making Porn* and Terrence McNally's Broadway triumph *Love! Valour! Compassion!*—and in some instances an entire script has been constructed around it, as is the case with the unabashedly frivolous *Party*. Re-

pleasure. When the lights come up again, the problems develop when one of the boys jars the other out of bed in hopes of facilitating a conversation. The characters then proceed to trudge their way through the play's lines, rehashing the same hackneyed subjects that have appeared in a multitude of gay-related plays which have, in their turn, at least contributed something more meaningful. The comedy here is stale (with the possible exception of one stretch that implemented a dildo to generate a rare moment of plot construction), and the dramatic tension is pulled from thin air to create an incredulous collage of preposterous responses to the contrived action.

Two Boys in a Bed strives to present itself as a sexually fueled comedy about a one-night stand that progressively sours as the evening unfolds to reveal the character's disparate persuasions of trust in love and relationships. The play shows how an evening of wanton sexual pleasure is spoiled when they begin to learn too much about each other. The audience is left to conclude that the playwright is emphasizing the utter hopelessness of gay relationships, or perhaps making the case that human understanding should not factor into recreational sex. In any



Eric-Paul Erickson (left) and John Oules in *Two Boys in a Bed* on a Cold Winter's Night

gardless of how pertinent to the action the flesh factor is, or how much substance must be sacrificed to accommodate it, alternative theater companies have learned that there exists no surpassable strategy to attracting patrons to the theater than to drum up the controversy that follows a caveat of full frontal nudity. Nothing, that is, except perhaps the presence of an engaging, well-produced play. But who needs a thoughtful play when there's exposed genitalia to be seen?

After the immense popularity of *Party*, this summer's revenue-generating hit, triangle productions! is offering another installment of theater of the disrobed with its current production of *Two Boys in a Bed* on a Cold Winter's Night. This play however, falls short of delivering anything other than a tedious demonstration of uninspired dialogue with moments of nudity that seem painfully more gratuitous than all of that within *Party*.

As the play opens, the two boys—played by Eric-Paul Erickson and John Oules—enter the theater accompanied by some fiercely sexual techno music, and we are immediately introduced to their unclothed forms. With nary a word uttered, the two unclad figures jump into bed to enjoy an evening of implicitly suggested sexual

event, any moral lesson that the playwright might wish to establish is completely overshadowed by the overwrought characterizations that he heaps upon us.

There is really nothing that could possibly redeem this production from its status as a play that sacrifices substance for an opportunity to cash in on ticket-selling titillation. The nudity is even wholly unsatisfying, as the character's forms are shrouded in shadow throughout the production in what must be an attempt to emulate the lighting of an actual bedroom—either that or half of the stage lights were inoperable for the particular production that I saw.

Both actors work hard under Don Horn's direction to create something out of the threadbare script, but they are left to writhe uncomfortably through the ridiculous poses that the play demands of them.

Two Boys in a Bed on a Cold Winter's Night runs through Feb. 1 at the Main Street Playhouse, 904 SW Main St., in Portland. Tickets are \$13 and are available at Jelly Bean or through the triangle box office at 223-6790, or Fastixx at 224-8499.

PHOTO BY RICK ADAMS