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ONE VOICE, MANY HANDS CLAPPING

*The monologue commands the spotlight for triangle's
repertory run of Three Viewings and Waiting for Vern*

by C. Jay Wilson Jr.



Nicholette Reid as Mac in "Thief of Tears," one of Three Viewings

An actor speaking alone on stage, free from competition with another performer for the attention of the audience: In this action- and spectacle-fueled entertainment age, the monologue retains the capability—like no other theatrical expression—to rend the imaginary veil between actor and audience.

Proving the transcendent power of a solitary performance, triangle productions! is producing

Theater

two plays in repertory that offer various ranges of the solo voice on stage. In the one-man show *Waiting for Vern*, veteran actor Michael Mendelson delivers a comical piece about an actor who appears on stage to find that he is unexpectedly without the assistance of the other cast member. *Three Viewings* combines the efforts of three performers in unrelated monologues set within a Midwestern funeral parlor.

Borrowing the theme of an anticipated guest who never shows from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, *Waiting for Vern* owes its action to the elusive character. Playwright James De Vita, however, steers his play from Beckett's absurdity and directs it into a comparatively straightforward account of an actor's seemingly unrehearsed succession of impressions, blathered in a frenzied effort to keep the audience entertained. The nervous and giddy chatter with the audience alternates between the prosaic and the sincere, with a rather weighty subtext concerning the gray area that exists between an actor and his or her dramatized persona.

Michael Mendelson offers a convincing performance of a neurotic actor, creating a character who possesses aplomb commingled with uncertainty—seemingly incongruous traits that Mendelson effortlessly carried off. Mendelson infused his performance with enough intensity to make the most trite issues of his character's overworked mind seem fraught with significance. In contrast, some of the more introspective moments of the play, particularly a section that portrays the character's father, revealed a surprising paucity of energy that, despite the sincerity of the delivery, gave me the feeling that an alternate characterization was at work.

As this play is essentially a dialogue with the reticent audience, the tone of the performance is

generated by the dynamic established by that entity. Consequently, *Waiting for Vern* will develop and strengthen throughout its run as Mendelson sharpens his improvisational instincts.

Death is the galvanizing force within the three monologues that comprise Jeffrey Hatcher's effective *Three Viewings*. The three portraits capture lives propelled into a heightened self-examination upon their respective involvement with ceremonies honoring the dead. The three characters share the basic commonality of setting, along with the need to unfold their personal accounts of their unpredictable tragedies and disappointments.

Eric Hull delivers the opening piece, involving a funeral director who finds it impossible to muster nerve to protest his love for one of the parlor habitués. His emotional paralysis affords him the privacy to speculate on the romantic inclinations of his beloved and the development of his own convincing discourse on fear and inactivity. Hull's rendering of the character's pathetic fate attacks the audience with dramatic force enough to leave it stunned by the end of his piece.

A woman who makes her living as a corpse robber and has her eyes on the prize that rests on her dead grandmother's finger is the subject of the scenario presented by the second monologue. Played with sultry electric veracity by Nicholette Reid, the character nonetheless has so many trunks full of emotional baggage, and the plot is given so many unexpected twists, that we fail to latch onto a consistent developmental pattern. Reid's timing was impeccable, however, and she mirrored the image I've had in my head concerning the appearance of corpse robbers from the L.A. area.

The final and by far the most exquisite monologue was offered by the incomparable Mary Marsh. This scene was the most facile of the three, but left me absolutely transfixed on Marsh's splendid depiction of a woman who reflects upon the life of her recently deceased husband and his unpaid debts. While not once moving from her perch on a sofa, Marsh manages a remarkable characterization through subtle movements and vocal inflections.

Three Viewings is what theater should be: a good old-fashioned drama about the stories entwined in the way we live and die.

Waiting for Vern and Three Viewings play through March 9 at the Main Street Theatre, 904 SW Main St. Tickets are \$13 from Jelly Bean, Music Millennium and the triangle box office, 223-6790, and \$14 when charged by phone from Fastixx, 224-8499.



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