

Love hurts

New play has plenty of queer angles
but also some deadly ones

BY ANDY MANGELS



From left: Spencer Conway, Nicholas Buriilini-Price and Michelle Maida are caught in a web of intrigue

If you think love is a killer of intimacy in relationships, you haven't been sleeping with the right killers.

This seems to be one of the messages in the new dark comedy from triangle productions! titled *Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love*. And when I say dark, prepare for a blood-stained stage even before the lights go down.

The setting for the play is Edmonton, Alberta, a city in which a serial killer of women might make the news, but such sordid events don't yet touch the lives of the characters. David (Nicholas Buriilini-Price) is a gay former television actor now making his living as a waiter.

He lives, *Will & Grace*-style, with ex-girlfriend Candy (Laura Faye Smith), a book editor. David's oldest friend is Bernie (Spencer Conway), a troubled straight man whose marriage is on the rocks and who seems to get into a lot of bloody bar fights. His other friend is Benita (Michelle Maida), a goth-girl tarot card reader and dominatrix-for-hire.

Into their lives come three other characters: Jerri (Torrey Cornwell), a lesbian at Candy's gym who has a crush on her; Robert (Jefferson L. Davis), a bartender who also has his eye on Candy; and Kane (Gabe Harmon), an adorable young busboy at David's job who is struggling with secret impulses.

As the story progresses—narrated by Benita, using horrific urban legends to introduce scenes—David is torn between his infatuation with Bernie and with Kane, avoiding his pain through anonymous sexual trysts in a park. Candy is drawn into her first lesbian affair, with Jerri, but also feels the need to affirm her heterosexuality in a shallow relationship with Robert.

But as the love/lust triangles become more overpowering, so too does the element of danger. It becomes clear that many of the people are hiding secrets, and Candy and David soon realize one of their circle indeed might be the serial killer—and one of them could be the next victim.

Written by Canadian playwright Brad Fraser, *Unidentified Human Remains* is a macabre change of pace for triangle. Multiple references to gory murders, as well as several bits of on-stage violence and a gunshot, might

be difficult for some theatergoers. But in the wake of popular serial killer movies such as *Seven*, *The Silence of the Lambs* and *The Cell*, there is probably an audience for this foray into darker territory.

Director Don Horn's staging is impressive and benefits from effective lighting by Jeffrey D. Woods and Mark Bauch, especially given that most of the cast is on stage throughout the entire production. Although the complex set and constant presence of the actors is initially jarring, audience members quickly will find themselves intrigued when they realize each character's story continues even when the spotlight is not on them.

Buriilini-Price is a little too physically imposing as David for us to be concerned about any on-stage threat to him, but his wittily sarcastic attitude and reactions to the moral quandaries of the story are spot-on. Cornwell is a delicious dyke, both a stereotype and an individual at once. Davis is given one of the least likable roles, but he makes the most of it (and looks awfully damn cute doing so), while Harmon gives just the right measure of naiveté and uncertainty to Kane.

Clues to the identity of the killer are tipped early on by both the script and the actor playing the character. I'm torn as to whether this was an effective choice, but the production certainly manages the choice well.

Unidentified Human Remains is a strong and engrossing play, well-cast and nicely directed. Audience members who don't like violent themes probably should stay away—as should those who might be offended by semi-nudity and some frank sexual dialogue—but fans of theater of the macabre would do well to make a date to see it. **JM**

UNIDENTIFIED HUMAN REMAINS AND THE TRUE NATURE OF LOVE runs through Nov. 11 at Theater! Theatre!, 3430 S.E. Belmont St. For tickets call the box office, 503-239-5919, or Fastixx.

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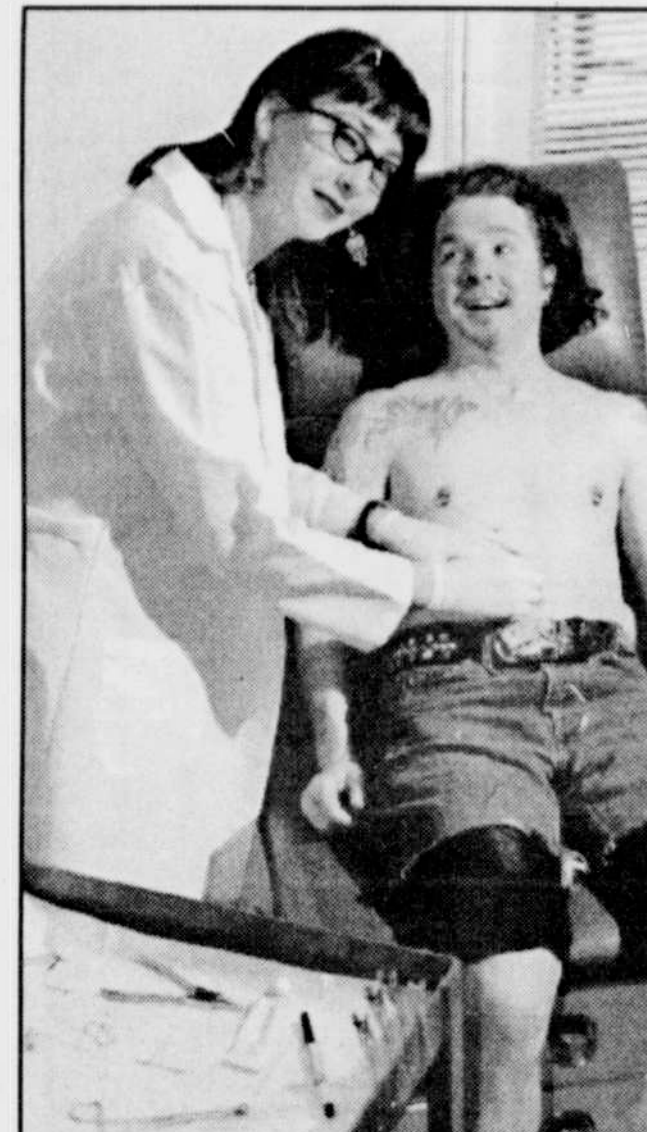


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