

THEATER

A Beeguiling buzz

triangle productions! opens its 12th season with a captivating comedy

BY TIMOTHY KRAUSE

Evan Wyler is a struggling, young gay writer. His debut novel has just been published, and his bare-chested likeness is selling books across town.

He's "the next big thing," on the verge of his 15 minutes of fame. And he's caught the attention of a sophisticated and glamorous woman with an electric presence that captivates Evan in more ways than one.

Alexa Vere de Vere is flawless. She's a sexy black dress clinging to ample cleavage and legs to die for. She's a black bob, an expensive clutch purse and a starlet's cigarette holder. She's smart, she's resourceful, and her charisma is compelling.

But as suave as she is, Alexa is more than just a rich fag hag. She's a manipulator, more grifter than goddess.

She's an alluring, name-dropping, bigger-than-life persona who quickly entrances Evan—and, in just their first meeting, convinces him to write the screenplay of her life. Almost as quickly, he fools himself into thinking he loves her.

And that's just the beginning of Douglas Carter Beane's *As Bees in Honey Drown*, a comedy staged by triangle productions! As the story continues, we learn the truth about Alexa and who she really is.

And, true to her character, Daria O'Neill's bewitching portrayal is the centerpiece of this production. Audiences might recognize the multimedia personality from her morning show on KNRK-FM or her recent stint as the voluptuous WB32 weather gal.

But here, O'Neill maintains a savvy sense of restraint and understatement. She makes this would-be caricature believable, even endearing. We, too, want to be won over by Alexa, follow

her, worship her, be seen with her and take care of her.

Spencer Conway plays hot, young Evan as eager, earnest and striving for literary acclaim. His physical appeal is evident, and no one blames Alexa for scrambling under the sheets with him. It's late in the play, however, when we glimpse Evan's neuroses brought out so deftly by Alexa, finally illuminating why a gay man who says he doesn't love anyone, but sleeps with men, could be so swept off his feet as to fall for this female con.

We end up not caring that Evan gets screwed

(pun intended) and instead find ourselves drawn back to Alexa. (Yes, perhaps, as bees to honey.)

Portraying the rest of the romantic and gritty New Yorkers are Timeca Briggs, CW Jensen, Mieko Mitchell-Berke and Scott Weimer, who enliven the urban landscape. They swirl around Evan and Alexa like ballroom dancers who, for the most part, find their rhythm.

Outstanding among this quartet is Weimer, who happens to be Portland's Mr. Gay Pride, 2001-2002. He nails each of his multiple roles,



From left, Spencer Conway, Timeca Briggs and Daria O'Neill generate a good buzz

none more important than Mike Stabinsky, the frustrated artist who ultimately reveals Alexa's juicy past. Weimer's cameos as a sales clerk and a musician showcase his comic range, while the final role of Mike permits him several tender and honest moments.

With director Don Horn at the helm, this Portland premiere of *Bees* is a clever and cunning production, smoothly sailing around Manhattan. His sparse staging allows the ear to savor Alexa's deliciously affected repartee. ("Dahling! Laaamb! Where did I see you last? Tiffany's? I so adore Tiffany's.")

Horn's minimal sets and props wisely focus attention on the performances, as does lighting designed by Jeffrey D. Woods. Costumes by Elizabeth Wright go a long way toward fleshing out the sometimes sketchy minor characters.

Beane, who also penned the screenplay *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Neumar*, is a witty storyteller, to be sure. But that skill is actually somewhat of a weakness in *Bees*, bending one of playwrighting's primary principles to "show, don't tell." His intriguing characters articulate funny and absorbing stories, but the play's thin plot provides little action, offering more amusing characterizations than active motivation.

Still, as Evan says to Alexa, confection, pure confection. **J**

AS BEES IN HONEY DROWN plays Thursday to Sunday through Sept. 29 at Theatre! Theater!, 3430 S.E. Belmont St. For times and tickets call 503-239-5919 or visit www.tripro.org.

TIMOTHY KRAUSE is a writer and editor in Portland whose former life included several years of working in professional theater.

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