

November 7 - 29, 2005

Low Level Panic Reviewed November 7

Running time 1:30 - no intermission

Performed at 1409 Playbill Cafe

Three young women dish the dirt about sex

v Mature themes/nudity

Suzanne Richard directs a play exploring women's self-image in a society fascinated with pornography. After the spectacular success she had re-envisioning the oft-produced Jesus Christ Superstar last year with a cast of nearly thirty, for which she was nominated for the Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Direction, here she is at the helm of a nearly unknown work with a cast of three, and there isn't the level of excitement or feeling of discovery that made her Superstar so, well, super. Instead, this rambling rumination on both sexism and genderism is a meandering single act that even at just 90 minutes, seems a bit too long.

Storyline: Three roommates have three different views of the expectations of society for young women's sexuality. In a series of conversations in their shared bathroom they complain, argue, brag, question and joke about men, dating, mating, pornography and body image.

In her program notes, director Suzanne Richard tells how the rehearsal process with its intensive exploration of the text line-by-line seemed to reveal to the cast that there was more to this than the merely "fair" play she thought it was on first reading. Perhaps, but the revelation didn't survive the process of putting the show on a stage. While it raises interesting questions and introduces distinct characters, it never seems to build toward a dramatic whole. It remains a merely fair play being given thoughtful, earnest delivery by a cast of three actresses.

Those actresses are Jessica Lynn Rodriguez as a woman who is terrified at not being able to find acceptance in the single world because of her weight, Selene Faer as one who would rather not conform to the standards she thinks men hold for single young women, and K. Clare Johnson as their roommate who is proud to measure up and expects to have her sexuality ratified by her success. The fact that Faer performs in her wheelchair as well as in the tub adds another layer of meaning to the script's examination of self-image and the appearance expectations of society, but neither Faer nor Richard allow that aspect to overwhelm the central points of the author, at least not after the opening scene which Faer performs in the nude. There are two cast members who are never seen - two male voices on tape which invade the women's minds.

Klyph Stanford's set is the most intriguing aspect of this production. He places the frame of a huge wall mirror between the audience and the performers who spend much of the time staring at themselves (and, thus, the audience) as they apply makeup, arrange their hair, pick at imperfections and consider their wardrobe. Behind them is a bathroom, complete with tub which is used both for bathing and dying clothes. The walls are lined in semi-soft and harder porn cut from magazines, surrounding these three women with the images of sexual identity they believe the world imposes on them.

Written by Clare McIntyre. Directed by Suzanne Richard. Design: Klyph Stanford (set) Melanie Clark (costumes) Rebecca L. Trotter (properties) Marianne Meadows (lights) Ian Armstrong (sound and photography) Karen Currie (stage manger). Cast: Selene Faer, K. Clare Johnson, Jessica Lynn Rodriguez and the voices of Michael Dove and Brandon Thane Wilson.