

## THEATER IN REVIEW

***THEATER IN REVIEW; Triangles, Bees And Bigots*****By Lawrence Van Gelder**

May 22, 2003

'Marathon 2003,' Program A

Ensemble Studio Theater

The doomed, the dead, the daring and the dysfunctional people the stage of Ensemble Studio Theater. New faces and new characters created by playwrights famed and unfamiliar inspire the start of Marathon 2003, the theater's 26th annual festival of new one-act plays.

This year's event offers 10 premieres in two series of five plays, the first in progress through May 29, and the second running from June 1 to 21, both at 549 West 52nd Street, Manhattan.

In the gratifying opening series, the highlights are the mordantly funny "Of Two Minds" by Billy Aronson and the tense "Honey Makers" by Deborah Grimberg.

In "Of Two Minds," directed by Jamie Richards, the playwright finds a formula for family and love in an age of fractured marriages, lack of communication and yearning for union. With a striking debut by Annie Campbell as the junior partner in a tempestuous and competitive mother-daughter relationship, this comedy takes its characters through a round of romantic intergenerational relationships in which the principal participants are unaware that they are sides of the same triangle. Geneva Carr is just right as the mother.

"The Honey Makers," directed by Tom Rowan and set in a small grocery in North London in 1990, is a story of brutish bigotry by skinheads against immigrants of Indian heritage. In this case the targets are a married couple, Arjun (Thom Rivera) and Lalita (Cori Thomas). The compassionate Arjun was a scholar before they fled Uganda. Now they operate a little store where she takes pride in stocking only the best brands. On a day when the skinheads are taunting them from outside, they have summoned an English beekeeper (Bill Cwikowski) to clear a swarm from their backyard garden. Both the refugees and the beekeeper will be attacked by a hulking and vicious bigot (Jake Myers). The voltage is high, the play convincingly acted.

Opening and closing the evening are two plays that come to grips with death. The first is Susan Kim's apocalyptic but unsurprising "Memento Mori," directed by Abigail Zealey Bess, with Cecilia deWolf as a flamboyant older woman with roots in show business and Amy Staats as her younger companion.

Romulus Linney's frail "Coda," directed by Julie Boyd, brings illumination (figuratively and literally) to two men (Thomas Lyons and Joseph Siravo) and two women (Helen Coxe and Jane Welch) as they face ultimate oblivion.

Risk-taking romance is left to the ingratiating James Rebhorn as George and Phyllis Somerville as Ivy as neighboring, bereaved Midwestern farmers in "A Blooming of Ivy" by Garry Williams, directed by Richmond Hoxie. The play is attenuated and sentimental, but disarming.

Marathon 2003 is off to a promising start. LAWRENCE VAN GELDER