

Life Section, September 3, 2006

'Incognito' Stirs Lost-and-found Feelings

Theatre Review

Reviewer: Kitty Montgomery

Didn't playwright Edward Albee tell us we all secretly yearn to be orphans, disassociated from the adults who presume to be our actual birth parents? Michael Fosberg's first-person singular discovery of his true paternity in his one-man multi-peopled play, "Incognito," affirms and belies Albee's theory in a coup de Coeur.

Fosberg inhabits the personal epiphany that is "Incognito," on stage tonight at the Byrdcliffe Theater, in a tour-de-force performance for Woodstock Fringe that is so low-key and natural, we never know he's grabbed us till we weep. He first presents the self who is author/actor in the act of familial self-discovery, not as monster ego, but as insecure actor nerd on the eve of disorder and discontent, upon learning of his mother's divorce after 25 years of marriage.

Threatened with the loss of connection to his stepfather, he determines to find his birth father, through information pried from his mother. Damned if he doesn't connect with the first phone call. The long-distance embrace between father and son, simultaneously trigger feelings of lost and found in us psychic orphans on the planet, encompasses us all.

But, hey, that's not all. Today, what urban intellectual hipster doesn't yearn for a touch of authenticating "ethnic" blood? (Read Native American, Fiji Islander,

African-American). However, a few decades ago, in middle-class America, marital integration between races was regarded as miscegenation, and "frowned upon" was not quite the phrase.

Fosberg's daddy, named Mr. Wood. Is a light-skinned African-American from a long line of distinguished ancestors, who was the love of Fosberg's mother's life, also for a time, her husband. They were college students, they had no money and after her son was born- he's a ringer for his handsome dad- she opted to move home to support and protection of her family in a close-knit Armenian community.

Wood has waited decades to hear from his boy, and the love feast is on. Grandparents, uncles, cousin's spring into life. We picnic, party, partake in a reunion and rejoicing with Fosberg, who blooms in an identity he feels he has always known. Who can say for sure why all this family stuff is so incredibly touching? Concurrently, we are moved by the unconditional love the son receives from the family of strangers, and by Fosberg's ultimate understanding and forgiveness of his mother. On opening night at the Byrdcliffe, she sat in the audience, with Fosberg's brother, who was seeing the play for the first time.

Finally, all us North Americans who are not Native Americans are possessed by a subliminal curiosity to know our roots. Deeper than a vain genealogical search, we yearn to know what our "folks" were really like, why we are who are, as we wonder who we might be. Ah there's the hook.