

Life Section, September 11, 2005

Reviewer: Kitty Montgomery

Woodstock Fringe Festival of Theatre & Song – Byrdcliffe Theatre - “Two by Two By Three”

Modestly billed as “an evening in two acts,” back to back performances of Judith Moore’s *For Sentimental Reasons*, and *Tuesdays & Sundays*, co-authored by Daniel Arnold and Medina Hahn, carried as separate but equally extraordinary acts of theater. The plays ran through the final week of woodstock fringe offerings at the Byrdcliffe Theatre, concluding September 4th.

Born in West Virginia and schooled by experiences great and small in New York City, Moore enjoyed a full blown performance career as a singing actress, before friends began urging her to write down memories of her life in the southland. She appeared in last season’s Fringe with Memrie Innerarity, as co-authors of *Stories to be Read with a Southern Accent*. This year, Moore sends in the amazing Wanda L Houston to give wings to *Sentimental Reasons*, her one woman play based on positive disturbance caused by a tape of “Feel It! Sam Cooke live from the Harlem Square Club, 1963.”

With the author as encouraging director, Houston, a gospel singing operatic star and visa versa, lives a character who chats easy as the lemonade she squeezes up and sugars, drawing us back to the glory day her best friend – and fiercest female rival - gets them two free tickets to the Harlem Square Club Sam Cooke show.

Moore, Houston and Cooke all share such joy in romantic love and song, their ebullience and musicality is contagious. We are swept into a young girl’s giddy preparations for a fairytale Harlem night, and into her squealing ecstasy when the suave prince charming on stage slips her name into a song and comes down to take her hand, dream come true.

Some forty years later, when she replays a tape of the performance, brought to her birthday party by the same lifetime girl friend, squeals and all, we’re drawn into that Cinderella moment by Houston and Sam’s song, combined, so reverie becomes the soul’s revival.

Arnold and Hahn, who conceived the haunting *Tuesdays and Sundays*, which treats conjugal sin and consequences shared by two young lovers with far greater tenderness than Theodore Drieser’s similar docu-novel, *An American Tragedy*, are on a permanent tour with their play. It fell, therefore, to Charles Traeger, current fringe production manager extraordinaire, and author of *Ordinary Occurrences*, among other plays, to bring in a pair of actors from the Yale School of Drama, Christiana Nelson and David Nugent, to convey the tragic tale.

Set in Margate, Canada in 1887, the play seems a dream enactment after the fact – pregnant Mary’s death, the upwardly mobile, education bound William’s act of murder, with the lovers simultaneously reliving their courtship, its consummation and consequences in dialogues that share a telepathic rapport. It’s a reminiscence of astral bodies – surely William was hung – who still suffer the yearnings that afflicted them in life. Whether they’re in heaven or hell, Mary is a noble spirit, William is a cad, but actors Nelson and Nugent, working from a shared psychic source, are vibrant, vulnerable and out of this world brilliant.