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**Theater**/Rebecca Daniels

## Woodstock Fringe leaves us with two fine memory plays

**M**emories can inspire or haunt us. They can remind us of those special times in our lives when everything came together to create a particular moment or event that was so ecstatic that it lives on in our hearts and minds forever reminding us of our potential for joy. Likewise, memories can be dreaded reminders of those darker times when we helplessly watched our dreams turn into nightmares. Last week, The Woodstock Fringe presented two very different memory plays at the Byrdcliffe Theatre under the collective title, *Two by Three by Three*. Unfortunately, for those that missed this excellent production, it closed the Woodstock Fringe Festival for 2005.

Wanda L. Houston gave an unforgettable performance in Judith Moore's new play, *For Sentimental Reasons*. Houston, recently seen on Broadway in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, is a large, attractive African American actress/singer who knows how to grab an audience's attention and hold it. As the 60-year-old housewife, Priscilla, making lemonade in her Florida kitchen, she shares her memories of the most thrilling night of her life, when in 1963 she met Sam Cook at one of his concerts. Her 30-minute monologue is delivered with such enthusiasm and attention to detail that we are swept up in her reverie, as though we are the ones being singled out from the crowd by an adored idol.

Playwright Moore skillfully directed Houston in this delightful one-act play. One of the highlights of last summer's Woodstock Fringe Festival was *Stories to be Read with a Southern Accent*, co-authored by Moore and Memrie Innerarity. Since its premiere last summer, *Stories* has been produced by the Abingdon Theatre Company in New York. No doubt *For Sentimental Reasons* is New York bound as well once Moore matches it with a suitable companion piece.

Houston can be seen Saturday, September 10, at TheaterSounds in Kingston where she'll be reading from Lee' Blessing's celebrated new play, *Going to St. Ives*. Shelly Wyant will direct Houston and Nicola Sheara in this play reading about two women: an eminent British eye surgeon and her most emi-

nent patient, the English-born mother of a Central African "emperor." The free reading is at 8 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church on 320 Sawkill Road in Kingston.

**B**ack at Byrdcliffe, a much darker memory play, *Tuesdays & Sundays* by Daniel Arnold and Medina Hahn, served as the companion piece to Moore's upbeat one-act. Canadian playwrights Arnold and Hahn have written a stylized piece involving two characters, William (David Nugent), an 18-year-old farm boy, and Mary (Christianna Nelson), a 16-year-old farm girl. The setting is "a memory of Margate, Canada 1887," What starts out as a giddy, romantic meeting between two young people ends with William murdering the pregnant Mary. A powerful and surprising play, *Tuesdays & Sundays* left the audience in a somber mood as they made their way home.

Susanna Gellert directed the two fine actors in this beautifully written play, first produced in 2000. In addition to its unexpected plot development, what makes this play unusual and interesting is its poetic quality. *Tuesdays and Sundays* is not intended to be realistic. The playwrights intersperse dialogue, narrative, melodic repetition of phrases and synchronicity of spoken words to weave together the tragic story of this ill-fated couple. At times the actors' move like dancers as they tell their story in this beautifully choreographed work. A bare stage and the austerity of the Byrdcliffe Theater's dark wooden walls were the perfect frame for this emotionally eloquent piece.

With Labor Day upon us, we're likely to see a theatrical slow-down in the Hudson Valley until next summer when things will pick up again. Thanks to Wallace Norman's dedicated work, The Woodstock Fringe Festival has become an eagerly anticipated event each summer with its professional offerings and fresh material. We're already looking forward, to the new fourth season next year. ++ .