

Different People/ Different Rooms

Playwrights Wendy Kesselman and Tom Walmsley present unconventional views of intimacy in their one-act plays presented under the production title **Different People/Different**

Rooms (78th Street Theater Lab, 236 West 78th Street, 595-0858).

Merry-Go-Round by Kesselman is a fantasy piece that begins with promise when an appealing Linda Cook shyly greets a young businessman in her walk-up apartment. The stiff and somewhat sinister young man (Quincey Long) begins to reminisce, and we gradually piece together that these two were childhood playmates. Apparently, it is only in this context that they can communicate, for after some awkward conversation which tells us nothing of their present lives, they plunge into a series of kids' games. In one, they undress each other and finally culminate an affair which seems to have begun in the nursery. In spite of a great deal of forced enthusiasm, no real emotions surface in this brief encounter. While Kesselman suggests that childhood games are charged with sexual tension, she does not develop that tension with any depth in her adult characters. The acting out of the past is cloying and self-serving, as empty as the reassurances the two exchange when they part. The metaphor of the merry-go-round reinforces the overall sentimentality of a play that has taken us for a long ride without going anywhere.

Tom Walmsley's **The Workingman** is a rough, action-crammed one-act play that stands in sharp contrast to the first half of the evening. Three people who compose a *menage a trois* travel to a small Western town and rent an unfurnished apartment in which they plan to film pornographic movies of themselves. An armed madman bursts into their rooms and touches off a bizarre series of plot twists that reveal surprising alliances. Extortion and murder are handled with an intelligent ruthlessness that recalls the sinister underdogs in the early works of Sam Shepard.

Director John Pepper skillfully handles the suspense and the tightly capped desperation of his characters. Actors Linda Cook and Quincey Long play out a raunchy and manipulative sexuality as the pair who hustle for a living. Steve Hofvendahl successfully challenges the role of nice guy/dupe by sustaining righteous fury when he realizes he has been betrayed, and Max Jacobs as the armed intruder is a schizophrenic gun for hire.

There are a number of show-downs and accusations which reveal each character's increasing vulnerability. The result is a taut, well-paced drama with sharp twists that come from the tangled minds of the people it exposes.

The two rooms were designed simply and effectively by Stephen Caldwell and lit by David N. Weiss. Randy Kovitz staged the fights which gave added realism to *The Workingman*.

—Mimi Leaver