

Why the only winners of the Sexual Revolution were the viruses.

Nearly Naked Theatre's *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* at On The Spot Theatre (For a map to location, click [this link](#))

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David Mamet's 1974 play *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* is the embodiment of the Meisner style of acting. David Mamet was an acolyte of Sanford Meisner in the early '70s, writing his initial plays in an obvious way that reveals character and action using Meisner phrasing and beats. This way of writing has evolved into the famous and oft-parodied "Mamet-meter." **Nearly Naked Theatre** is presenting this biting satire of modern sex and romance, moving it from early '70s hedonism to a late '70s disco inferno. Director **Tim Butterfield** has collected an impressive cast, and made several different choices, including quashing the "Mamet-meter" for a less stylized, more realistic presentation. The result is an enjoyable romp through bars, beds, and other battlefields of the Sexual Revolution.

Debbie and Dan are new recruits into the battle of the sexes, led through the trenches by battle-scarred friends Joan and Bernie. Bernie is brash, Joan bitter. Debbie and Dan stumble into a sexual tryst, then try to build a romance on their one-night-stand. There's hope that something sweet might come of this backwards stab at a relationship, although Bernie and Joan lurk behind, threatening to inject their own individual brands of poison into the mix.

Mr. Butterfield has paced the intermissionless show briskly, adding to the jaded feel. He has also come up with some creative ways to ensure the flow of this episodic script, including his set design, which affords a clever view of the boudoir activities of the young couple. His character work with the actors is impressive, and he has helped them to make some different choices. Some work, and some that don't, but they are welcome for their choice in the first place.

The broadest work comes from **Tim Shawver** as the outspoken Bernie. Most performers tend to fall into the macho jerk mould embodied by original Off-Broadway actor F. Murray Abraham. Mr. Shawver, though, creates an odd mix of Joe Isuzu and Ratso Rizzo, an obviously sexually conflicted inveterate liar with squeaky voice and tall tales. It's a vastly different choice, and works wonderfully, even if his character tends to overshadow others in the cast. There is subtlety and great character movement in **Michael Sherwin's** Dan. He gains our sympathy and loses it with a

solid command of his character's arc. His various transformations are completely believable, and heartbreaking.

The women's camp of this battle is much more subdued. **Lisa Faser's** Joan is bitter, but not braying. Her pain seems much more internalized, and her violent reactions restrained. In the all-important scene between Joan and Bernie, she chooses not to rise to Mr. Shawver's level, and is limited through most of the remainder of the play for it. Ms. Faser does deserve kudos, though, for her wonderful bit as storyteller near the end of the piece, where her character's deeply-rooted conflict finally arises. The normally vibrant **Andrea Morales** is dampened here. Where Mr. Sherwin makes his transition from sheep to pig seamlessly, Ms. Morales livens up only during the middle romantic section. She is not quite sharp enough at the outset, and draws into herself too far as her character gains war wounds.

The design team does an excellent job here. **Marc Pacheco's** sound design matches the perfect snippet of song for each of the blackout scenes, making this one soundtrack to a play I'd gladly purchase from the company. **Kevin Kleinhanzl's** costumes are as much a character as the actors, and Mr. Butterfield and **Alicia Sanderson's** lighting works to great effect.

While this play seems pretty tame compared to the stir it created in the early '70s, it is not dated. The timeless characters that Mamet has created don't allow this script to go stale. While the Hustle and Disco Ball add nostalgic touches to this fun piece, the eternal battle of men and women holds the audience's attention for deeper effect.

Production Details:

Sexual Perversity in Chicago by **David Mamet**

Nearly Naked Theatre

On The Spot Theatre, Phoenix (For a map to location, click [this link](#))

(602) 274-2432

May 25th - June 10th, 2001

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