

Tinseltown Tirade

Hollywood and whine

BY ROBERT L. PELA

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What are the chances that Nearly Naked Theatre will continue to rack up winners with its string of subversive, complex plays? I've watched as small companies have managed a handful of hits with cute musicals and Neil Simon revivals, and seen my share of avant-garde troupes wither and die after a season or two of curious shows by radical writers. But no company in the past decade has come anywhere near this nearly unbeatable upstart. Nearly Naked consistently surprises audiences with daring subject matter and excellent productions. Even the company's near-misses (*The House of Yes*; *Baylin's Monster*) have strutted with a confidence and style that rival our local Equity houses. Where is Nearly Naked finding these talented actors and directors? Why aren't these people also working at other small, avant-garde playhouses?

Nearly Naked's latest slam-dunk is David Rabe's *Hurlyburly*, which won the 1985 Tony Award for Best Drama. The 1998 film version, for which Rabe wrote the screenplay, won critical praise but sank without a trace, and the superbly glib and profoundly filthy play is seldom seen, in part because it's so long and because few theater groups are brave enough to unleash Rabe's misogynistic raving on its audiences.

Bent on proving how corrupt and self-indulgent Hollywood really is, *Hurlyburly* drops us into the hectic, hedonistic home of a pair of TV actor types who spend more time doing lines than they do learning lines; more time abusing women and every moral standard than they do making television deals. There's very little story here; Rabe's dark-hearted comedy, set sometime in the 1980s, is essentially a three-hour series of rants and arguments bellowed by the most despicable men you'd ever want to meet. But oh, what bellowing, as realized by Steven J. Scally in a magnificently scary performance, and Christian Miller, who carries the show as Eddie, a profoundly disturbed scoundrel whose endless drug- and booze-fueled raving about women (why can't they be more like men?) and his friends (why are they all such losers?) might have grown tiresome if hollered by a lesser actor. But Miller's motor-mouthed, exasperated delivery and crazed pacing exude desperation and ire. And I'm anticipating nightmares in which I am thrown from my car by Scally, so forceful was his performance as philandering Phil, the meanest psycho in Tinseltown. These two are well supported by Scott Dillon as Eddie's sleazy roommate, and Kerry McCue as his girlfriend; unfortunately, the other players don't get anywhere near Miller's and Scally's powerful performances.

Hurlyburly isn't directed, it's choreographed, and April Smith's graceful manipulation of these lost, frantic people -- who cover nearly every inch of Alicia Marie Turvin's magnificent set with their frenzied, drug-induced pacing -- captures the caged desperation of Rabe's crazed characters. Smith knows that the women of *Hurlyburly* are accomplices in their own abuse and, more important, that a three-hour play in which fucked-up men torment one another can also be an entertaining evening



With the bathwater? Christian Miller and pals bellow beautifully in *Hurlyburly*.

Details

Hurlyburly

Continues through December 4. Call 602-274-2432

Where: Little Theatre at Phoenix Theatre, 100 East McDowell Road



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