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THE THEATER MIRROR, New England's LIVE Theater Guide

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"What Happened in Boston, Willie"

Reviews of Current Productions

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"Under Her Umbrella"

Written & Directed by Brian Tuttle

Scenery Design by Brian Tuttle

Lighting Design by Eliza Lay

Costume Design by Greg Maraio

Sound Design by Brian Tuttle

Stage Management by Eliza Lay, James Snow, Jason Warner

Dean.....Joey Pelletier

Emily.....Julie Levene

Sasha.....Nastasha Drobnica

Feven.....Eliza Lay

Mr. Eddings.....Adam Harper

Connor.....Greg Maraio

I just saw the world premiere of "Under Her Umbrella" by an ensemble new to me. Ensembles don't have stars. But they have excellent acting --- because everyone listens to what everyone else is saying. The 11:11 Theatre Company is an ensemble --- one of a surprising number of new young companies lately that have come to Boston with talent intact that have found the Devanaughn or The Actors' Workshop good places to begin. These companies are all alike in that each of them is unique.

11:11 centers around their playwright/artistic director Brian Tuttle, who has a trunk-full of plays he hopes to do at three or so a year --- plus whatever new plays he writes, and maybe a Chekhov just for a change of pace. He wants to keep the company together and add maybe one or two new actors each play until there's an ensemble of about a dozen who can work back-stage and on-, for whom he says he can write new plays to showcase their individual acting talents. He says he wrote

"Under Her Umbrella" for --- no, you'll have to Guess which of the six he wrote it for. Which means you'll have to go see it, doesn't it? Good..... Because the writing is pure poetry and most of the acting astounding.

The play begins when a bewildered guy whose girl-friend's left him wanders into a bathroom and faints.

None of the pipes to anything in the bathroom work (for those they use the next-door apartment, owned by a girl from Russia), so the flat's owner uses it as a sitting-room. She's just taken on a new roommate --- a Tufts student who fell so in love with Europe she did no schoolwork for her entire year abroad. The new roommate has a boy-friend who admits to manic-depression and when he can force himself plays in a band --- sometimes. The flat-owner Likes the arts and is an Arts Administrator trying to get the Medford City Council to authorize a new Council for her to administer arts for. She has a comforting though ironic "Good friend" --- a high school substitute teacher with an unhappy wife.....

And anyway, nothing at all of what I've told you is as important as the fact that all of these people (I almost said "these Actors" --- which is also true) actually Trust each other enough to reveal the deepest innermost truths about themselves, often in the most poetic yet direct words and gestures. The depth of their sincerity is touchingly, dangerously honest, whether they talk, or just listen.

This kind of happenstance confrontations may have been real in the Haight-Ashberry Summer Of Love, but to find this sort of poetry on the stage you probably have to dig back to "You Can't Take It With You" or the screwball movies of the late '30s. The characters are as luminously vulnerable as any in Tennessee Williams, though their metaphors are much more lyrically precise. Once their inner lives begin to glow, the un-reality they live becomes irrelevant.

Adam Harper's married teacher comes off as a tall, wryly ironic hat-rack, whose love remains for most of the play in deep sub-text; Nastasha Drobnica's neighbor varies between Russian ennui and Russian passion; the guitarist Greg Maraio plays desperately needs people who know without being told what he Doesn't Mean; Eliza Lay's admittedly screwed-up Europe-lover speaks as movingly with her words as with her eloquent toes, and Joey Pelletier, sleeping comfortably in the empty bathtub, is in aimless search of his own name. And that leaves Julie Levene, as the flat-owner, painfully ignoring the frequent phone-calls of her ex-husband, hoping reluctantly for tense Good-Friendship to catch final fire, fighting a fight for The Arts against un-funded odds --- while learning to empathize with nearly everyone else at once.

This isn't an easy play to review, but once it lurches crazily, humanely into action its shifting fogs glow with beautiful, poetic truths. It is insidiously moving to watch.

And 11:11 is a company..... no, an Ensemble ... to be watched. If you miss them in the next three days, their next show's in March, and they don't intend to disappear.

**Love,
===Anon.**

"Under Her Umbrella" (10 - 18 December)

11:11 THEATRE COMPANY

Actors' Workshop, 327 Summer Street, BOSTON, MA

1 (617)851-8321 or info1111@hotmail.com

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