

STAGE REVIEW

Are You Sure?

*Back Alley Theatre
(opened Feb. 10)*

Half the fun in Sam Bobrick's mystery-comedy "Are You Sure?" is figuring out what the mystery is. Like "Dungeons and Dragons," you can pretty well design your own game.

For instance: could it be that Caroline (Lois Nettleson), exhausted by acting out her problems with first husband, elderly Simon (Jack Collins), second husband Charlie (Jeffrey Haddow), who beats, cheats and charms her, and third husband, jealous conventional David (Ronny Cox), opts for being a maid? Has she abandoned being the heroine in her own life to be a supporting character in somebody else's? Do the Jack in the Box murders take place in the deranged mind of one of the characters? If so, which one? Is one of them, science-fiction style,

exercising mind control? (Over characters that read "Jane Eyre" and other "safe" books, Bobrick snidely implies, that might not be a bad idea.) Are the characters consciously role playing: Haddow as Colombo, Charlie the Charmer, Fang; Ellen Maxted as Daughter or Sex Symbol; Collins as Father or First Husband; Catherine McLeod as Mother or Maid? Or are they just playing? or is it all a dream within a dream?

What it's not is theatre of the absurd, Martin Esslin's term for the depiction of the randomness of life in nonrealistic terms. Bobrick's people are quite clearly acting out their conscious or unconscious fantasies (or his) in a lucidly crafted play. How fascinating it is to the viewer depends largely on his willingness to open to a little nonlinear madness.

Nettleson and Haddow have roles ripe in opportunities that they pluck with relish, he with elfin ease, she with bemused sinuousness. Ronny Cox, in an aptly understated performance, finds many facets in David from the

importunate husband who begs his wife to taste a poisoned cocktail to the steely mind-bender. Collins is brusque and paternal as Simon, Maxted is a flapperesque maid-daughter and McLeod gives matriarchal presence to the roles of the maid-grandmother.

Allan Miller's direction is straightforward and sly. Kraig Aaronson designed a lighting concept which features and explosion of light on Caroline's every entrance. (Is this a clue?) Hilary Sloane designed the sophisticated costumes. Jim Billings' set is suggestive of your garden variety home.

— **Laura Hitchcock**