



VARIETY



VOL. 206 No. 56

32 Pages

Hollywood, California-90028, Tuesday, February 26, 1985

Newspaper Second Class P.O. Entry

50 Cents

Tues., Feb. 26, 1985

LEGIT REVIEW

Duet For One

(The Back Alley Theater; \$14 top)

Tom Kempinski's "Duet For One" is a marvelous play that doesn't shrink from tackling the Big Question: What is the meaning of life?

Based on the life of cellist Jacqueline Du Pre, the story concerns a famous violinist who has contracted multiple sclerosis and can no longer play. Denied the passion that drives her life, she begins seeing a psychiatrist, trying to make sense of her new existence.

What is so remarkable about this play, what lifts it above so many trite psychiatric scenes one is treated to on stage, film and the tube, is that her struggle becomes a paradigm of the quest for meaning that everyone engages in. The violinist is much more than some interesting but distant case history; she is every person who ever tried to find a reason for living.

Linda Kelsey (playing Stephanie Abrahams) gives a bravura performance as she takes her character from denial (who's got a problem?) to self-destructive despair to that peculiarly hopeful point at the end of the play, when no answers are in sight, just the struggle to find them.

The entire work brings Abrahams to where she is finally ready to start constructing a new life. She might

eventually fail, but Kelsey has made it a privilege to watch this noble woman reach as far as she has.

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Duet For One

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Allan Miller gives a powerful performance, perfectly capturing that aggravating — to the patient — manner of the psychiatrist who waits in silence, resisting scrutiny, as the client thrashes about trying to figure out what to say.

He does, of course, eventually speak, to help Abrahams put her pain into a larger perspective and to demolish the games she is playing with him and herself. This psychiatrist is a philosopher/guide who doesn't know the final destination himself, but who can help Abrahams get started on her own path to salvation.

Director of this fine work is Ron Satlof; producer, Laura Zucker. The first-rate set design is by Christopher M. Idoine; lighting, by Joseph N. Tawil; costumes, Martha Burke, and sound, Jerry Sider. "Duet For One" runs through March 31. *Bask.*