



Reviews

Rubbers and Yanks 3, Detroit 0

REVIEWED BY TREVOR THOMAS

Produced by Allan Miller at The Back Alley Theater, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys; 780-2240. Plays Fri.-Sun., 8:00; through May 11.

Poor Assemblyperson Mrs. Brimmins (Jessica Rains) has tried on four prior occasions to get her contraceptive open sales bill through the New York Legislature. No dice. The people on her side won't support the bill, and even the majority leader Mr. Clegg, an ex-lover (Wynn Irwin) on the opposite side of the floor can't hold back the inveighing of his legions against such dangerously progressive legislation.

Jonathan Reynolds' two one-act plays were originally produced at the American Place Theater in New York under the direction of Alan Arkin. *Rubbers* and its companion piece *Yanks 3, Detroit 0* (top of the seventh as we watch a woebegone pitcher fall apart while slowing giving up four runs) are a marvelous pair of satiric gems. One might complain of little difficulties here and there like the transitions between farce and surrealism, or that particularly unfortunate scene between Mrs. Brimmins and Mr. Clegg when alone on the floor of the Assembly, but one rarely gets to hear such *literate* theatre any more and it is a pleasure.

Laura Zucker's direction is, by and large, excellent. She gives more emphasis to style and delivery — line reading — than to blocking and this allows her actors to develop some fine characterizations. She is also responsible for the superb sound design that gives such insistency to *Yanks 3, Detroit 0*.

Jessica Rains reigns brilliantly over the rubber-obsessed New York Assembly. Her gestures and postures are delightful, seemingly culled from a Charles Schulz invention grown up. This is a mean and trying role, easy to misread. I felt Ms. Rains was 95% perfect. The missing five percent is caused by the pressing down on her voice to achieve an authoritative sound. The strain takes effort which should be directed to the character. If she would raise the pitch of her voice just a little and continue everything else as before, all would be perfect. The same suggestion applies to the superb Roger Reid as Assemblyman Mr. Townsend. The joy of *Rubbers* (forgive me) lies in the construction of the piece in which the rules of order allow each actor a gratifying monologue. We therefore get to see some excellent performances by James Hornbeck, Eli Rill, Bruce Kirby, John Anderson and Wynn Irwin as they each hold forth. William Utay is a delight as Mr. Mutrix, Acting Speaker.

Yanks 3, Detroit 0 is a tour de force for the pitcher Duke Bronkowski, played by Tom Bower. This absolutely treacherous role is complex and sustained, requiring enormous skill. Bower, an actor to watch in the future, creates a completely believable portrait, sustains beautifully, and engages our interest and involvement throughout. He has a superb foil in Robert Lesser as catcher "Beanie" Maligma.

While not quite as smooth as *Rubbers* (forgive me) this play is more adventurous as it involves many transitions between the inner workings of Bronkowski's mind and the outer realities of a losing ball game. One of the best inner workings is Ilene Kristen as Bronkowski's groupie Donna Luna Donna who has a delightful and provocative short solo section. The remainder of the characters are doubled up from the first play with again especially good work from James Hornbeck and Roger Reid.