



## *Small Domestic Acts*

June 20<sup>th</sup> through July 13<sup>th</sup>

Theatre Out at the Hunger Artists Theatre  
699-A S. State College Blvd Fullerton

For tickets and information call (714) 826-8700 or log on to  
theatreout.com.

By Keith Dillon, *The Stage Door Swings*, KUCI 88.9 FM in Irvine

For a theatre lover, seeing a play is an adventure; you simply never know when you might walk into some ugly little storefront theatre, deposit your buttocks into a theatre seat padded with plywood and discover something. It's like art collecting or archeology; if the play is rare and beautiful, it's worth all the inflammation your hemorrhoids can tolerate.

On Friday, June 20<sup>th</sup> at the Hunger Artists Theatre in Fullerton, I made just such a discovery. The occasion was Theatre Out's premiere of Joan Lipkin's remarkable new play, *Small Domestic Acts*. Theatre Out is Orange County's Gay & Lesbian theatre. They are an at-large theatre which is a fancy way of saying they have no home yet. *Small Domestic Acts* is being presented at the Hunger Artists Theatre in Fullerton, through the courtesy of the Hunger Artists Theatre Company. In *Small Domestic Acts*, Ms. Lipkin tells a daring tale of a quartet or, rather, a foursome for poker. The two couples are the Straights, Frank and Sheila, and the Lesbians, Frankie and Sheila. The Straights, Frank (David Beatty) & Sheila (Lori Kelley), are a middle-aged couple running headlong into uncertainty about their marriage. The Lesbians, Frankie (Maryanne Mosher) & Sheila (Katie Chidester the night I attended), are a pair of lesbian women who are beginning to question what life is like on the other side. Frank and Frankie work together and, soon, the two couples begin meeting every week for poker. At first, their conversations are light: "how's work?," "I saw something funny at the Grocery store," that kind of thing. After the poker, and they separate, however, the conversations turn ugly. In the Straight household, together time is bewilderment; Sheila's discontentment confuses Frank and, despite Frank's best efforts, Sheila becomes annoyed with Frank's very presence. At the Lesbian house, Sheila begins wondering about Sheila Straight: I wonder what she's doing tonight. The configuration of the play changes dramatically by the end; as the winners are left in ecstasy, the losers wondering how it happened.

*Small Domestic Acts* is the third play I've seen this season that takes place on the battlefield of infidelity. Craig Wright's *Orange Flower Water* offers redemption to a couple who found life where they shouldn't have and Alexandra Gerston's *My Thing of Love* offers a biting satire in the midst of a domestic tragedy. *Small Domestic Acts*, on the other hand, offers an intrigue. Can love really be defined by sexual orientation? In our society, you can't define love by race or age or even disability; it's gouache. But everybody knows that a Gay cannot fall in love with a Straight and visa versa. It seems the Gay community is as insistent on this point as the Straight community, but isn't it possible they're both wrong? And if they are, then what the hell does "Gay" & "Straight" mean anyway? Kevin Smith asked this question in his 1997 film *Chasing Amy*. Some have accused Mr. Smith of indulging in fantasy with *Chasing Amy*, yet Ms. Lipkin's play asks the same question Mr. Smith's film does, only she asks it from a woman's perspective. Must be a nagging question, that. Unlike Mr. Smith, however, Ms. Lipkin also addresses the ones left behind. The partner who tries to reconcile and gets burned is given her/his say in this play. And what he/she has to say is as compelling as the story of the "happily ever afters." Someone always gets hurt.

*Small Domestic Acts* is a gem, a real find for anyone looking to discover. At least as of this writing, Joan Lipkin's play has not yet either been published or produced professionally. That's shocking, given the play's quality of writing. Ms. Lipkin's play is a remarkable mixture of logic and human emotion. Written in what Professor Robert Cohen might call a meta-theatrical form, *Small Domestic Acts* presents its story as a memory told directly to the audience by the characters on the stage. There is no fourth wall; the audience is as much a part of the action as the characters are.

The production is directed by Jack Millis. The set designs, credited to David C. Carnevale & Joey Baital, are simply a bare stage, four chairs, two benches and a table. With the exception of some "house lights up" moments orchestrated by the cast, the light design by Joy Bice is simply sufficient to light the action. Mr. Millis must rely solely on the genius of Ms. Lipkin's play and the skills of his first-rate cast to make his show. And his cast is, indeed, first-rate. As Lesbian Sheila, Katie Chidester, as usual, is striking, a skilled actor with a remarkable range and a simple, mesmerizing delivery. Kimberley K. Mitchell also plays Lesbian Sheila, but I haven't had the opportunity to see her work. David Beatty plays Frank Straight, the harried husband. Mr. Beatty is a charismatic, highly skilled actor who has found a play worthy of his talents. The simple honesty of Maryanne Mosher's performance as Frankie is the anchor of this production. Lori Kelley is convincing and strong as Straight Sheila, a woman left confused by time and her own feelings.

Theatre Out is Orange County's Gay & Lesbian Theatre, a theatre whose mission it is to present shows to an Orange County audience that have either Gay & Lesbian themes or have been written by undiscovered Gay & Lesbian writers. That alone, from where I sit, simply isn't enough; the theatre must also be good. Regardless of what their mission may be, Theatre Out is one of Orange County's finest theatre companies, a remarkable group of people that presents productions of the highest quality on a shoestring; if they budget more than \$500 a production, I'll eat my hat. Theatre Out is a find, a real discovery, and Joan Lipkin's play *Small Domestic Acts* is, at least to my taste and knowledge, Theatre Out at its finest.