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# DAILY VARIETY

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DAILY VARIETY GOTHAM

## Off Broadway Review

### I [Heart] Kant

(Linhart Theater; 65 seats; \$18 top)

A Committee Theater Company presentation of a play in one act by Ken Urban. Directed by Dylan McCullough. Set, Lee Savage; costumes, Emily Rebholz; lighting, Thom Weaver; sound, Elizabeth Rhodes; production stage manager, Lauren Duffie. Opened Sept. 8, 2006. Reviewed Sept. 9. Running time: 1 HOUR, 10 MIN.

Linda ..... Kate Benson  
Betsy ..... Frances Mercanti-Anthony  
Pam ..... Edelen McWilliams  
Maureen ..... Kate Downing  
The Guy ..... Steven Boyer

By MARILYN STASIO

Despite its daunting title, "I [Heart] Kant" doesn't pay much lip service to the 18th century German philosopher's weighty theories on the categorical imperative. In fact, the four flaky women who figure in Ken Urban's neurotic little comedy show less interest in Kant's supreme principle of morality than in having a good time — or at least in experiencing something stimulating enough to drag them out of their collective depression and narrow lives.

The four characters, whose lives are rigidly defined by the confining cubicles of Lee Savage's cleverly designed set, have quite different notions of what constitutes a satis-

fying existence, or what less neurotic people might call "happiness."

For Maureen (Kate Downing), a young grade-school teacher, it's the attentions of a boyfriend who beats her and a constant supply of heroin. For Pam (Edelen McWilliams), the divorced mother of an obstreperous child, it's being able to breathe after she's buried in the debris of a bomb blast.

For Betsy (Frances Mercanti-Anthony), who was so bummed out at turning 30 that she slept with her brother, happiness has a lot to do with sex. And for Linda (Kate Benson), Maureen's sister and a longtime grad student in philosophy, it would be finishing — or at least starting — her dissertation on Kant.

Urban has a real flair for writing polished monologues, and under Dylan McCullough's finicky direction, all four actresses do a decent job of filling in the blanks of these character studies.

Downing, in particular, manages to bring some reflective nuances to Maureen's raw misery,

while Mercanti-Anthony taps the self-loathing humor in Betsy's promiscuity. McWilliams and Benson are OK, too, although Steven Boyer seems a bland choice to play the various men who flit in and out of their nowhere lives.

Once the isolating walls of the boxed set come down, allowing the characters to give the monologue a rest and begin to interact, scribe indicates he's at last ready to tackle Kant's philosophical dicta on the

pursuit of the sublime. Lest anyone in the audience miss the transition, all four women helpfully announce, "This is the moment when something weird begins to happen."

Alas, it never does. Betsy goes

looking for her friend Pam. Pam talks some sense into Maureen about beating up her little pupils. Linda connects with her sister and goes to a music club. And so on.

But the notion of pursuing the sublime by reaching out to others barely gets off the ground before the walls go up again, indicating — well, whatever the playwright wants it to indicate. Besides the fact that he is obviously more comfortable writing monologues.

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