

THEATER MANIA : RANDOM HARVEST

stand to win awards.

Considering that premise, it's odd that there is constant praise of the Drama Desk Awards throughout the play. When Aaron actually does win the award, he dances around and places it on his windowpane, where it is hit by dramatic, blue lighting that makes the trophy look surreal and beautiful. Is this a case of hint, hint? Or is Willet trying to be satirical about the importance of awards in general? One hopes that the latter is the case.

The first half of the play is especially problematic, as we are faced with a bunch of stereotypes: Jimmy (Jay Alvarez), the flamboyant gay boyfriend; Aaron, the insecure writer; and Greer, the witty, egotistical actor. We are rarely allowed to see why we should care about these characters. The structure that Willet has created, shifting between the reality of Aaron's life and his hallucinations involving Susan and Greer, overwhelms the play in its cleverness. And the reasons that Susan and Greer are haunting Aaron seem preposterous.

Aside from these many difficulties, another major inadequacy of *Random Harvest* is the relationship between Jimmy and Aaron. While Jimmy is an intriguing character, Alvarez often plays him as little more than a stereotype. Also unfortunate is the fact that there is almost no chemistry between Alvarez and Welsh. (By the way: If Aaron hates actors so much, why did he ever start dating Jimmy, who is an actor?)

The play redeems itself somewhat in its second half, as we are allowed to see more character development in Aaron, Jimmy, and Susan. There is an especially effective scene in which Aaron helps Susan to realize that she was successful in life. Surprisingly, one of the most truthful lines in the entire play comes from Jimmy, the paper-thin stereotype. When he decides to break up with Aaron, Jimmy tells him, "I have this fantasy that, when I'm gone, you'll write about me. That's how you love people."

The one shining performance in the production comes from Kate Downing as Susan Peters. Downing has a delicate face that is characteristic of classic movie stars like Ingrid Bergman; she gives a gentle, sweet portrayal of the almost forgotten Peters, who is the most engaging character in the play—the actress' mysterious death and lost fame are far more interesting than the neuroses of some writer who is scared of winning a Drama Desk award.

Random Harvest is frustrating in that it is a deeply flawed play which contains some very good ideas. Willet can get to the core of his characters when he allows himself to do so, but that rarely happens. He is presumably writing from his own experience, but he should take a lesson from his character Aaron and not be afraid to explore his talent more fully.

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