

Nashville Scene

Mixed Bag

Tennessee Rep and Boiler Room open their seasons with familiar fare

by Martin Brady

If Tennessee Repertory Theatre's current production of *Three Days of Rain* triggers a sense of déjà vu, it might be because Mockingbird Theatre staged the same play locally just six years ago. Even more coincidental, the Rep's artistic team of David Alford and Rene Copeland were the same guys who staged *Rain* at Mockingbird back in 2000. Admittedly, Alford/Copeland's decision to fill an important slot in their five-play season with a work they had already done was a bit of a puzzler. But if their goal was to do the play greater justice the second time around, then the good news is they succeeded.

Richard Greenberg's script is a cleverly constructed drama set in New York City, where a thirty-something brother and sister reunite following the death of their father. Their meeting takes place in the loft space where their parents first lived in the '60s. The peripatetic and troubled sibling Walker (Alford) has arrived in an attempt to grapple with long-unresolved personal and family issues. He and sister Nan (Shelean Newman), who mostly hash things over in a prickly fashion, are joined by Pip (Ross Brooks), the son of their father's partner in an architecture firm. Pip, it turns out, had an affair with Nan years ago. That wasn't known to Walker, who apparently also had unrequited feelings for Pip.

The Act One setup offers intrigue and snappy dialogue, but Greenberg's real writerly triumph comes in Act Two, when we flash back to the 1960s and see Walker and Nan's parents (played by Alford and Newman) and Pip's dad (Brooks) engaged in their own personal angst, which thus provides the audience with a kind of reverse foreshadowing that brings clarity to the emotional storms witnessed with the younger generation.

Greenberg places a conveniently revealed diary into the scenario, which seems a little too easy a device for linking past to present, but it serves its purpose.

The performances, under Copeland's attentive direction, take place on Gary Hoff's plainly arty set, which basks in the glow of Phillip Franck's warmly effective lighting. Alford and Newman are six years older now than the first time they played these roles in the Mockingbird production, but they haven't lost their connection to the characters, and the casting works. Alford, in particular, shines in his Act Two portrayal of Ned, a sensitive and quirky but ultimately quite likable fellow afflicted with a stutter.

Maybe the Rep really restaged *Three Days of Rain* because it was budget-friendly and afforded the principals the chance for a slam-dunk success. At any rate, the bottom-line result is smart, edgy and thoughtful professional regional theater that represents our town at its best. The play continues through Nov. 4 at TPAC's Johnson Theater.