

**Theater**

**Let The Playworks Begin**

*Two one-acts start the script-in-hand season*

By Carol Burbank  
 The cocktail party comedy of Albert Cassorla's one-acts, *Times Two* and *Homeowners' Blues*, opened the Play Works Company's season last Sunday with a funny, complicated, script-in-hand reading at the Walnut Street Theatre.

The comedies follow two traumatic moments in the lives of Helen and Hubie Karvonowich-Midhessel. *Times Two* showed the arrival of surprise twins orchestrated by a Hindu Groucho Marx obstetrician and a cheery, singing and dancing anesthetist. Through the manic Dr. Bengoli, we see the farfetched results of birthing babies the natural, drug- and trauma-free way, no matter what happens to the parents. While *Homeowners' Blues* follows the moments leading up to the couple's decision to buy a "rehab fever" house, pushed forward by the coercion of the realtor and dreams of millions of dollars saved and earned for a royal future.

Cassorla's humor is the kind that brings parties to life. He keeps the audience laughing with improbable exaggerations of yuppie reality. In *Times Two*, Helen and Hubie read lists of chic sounding names which translate into phrases like "liver of the donkey" and ar-

gue over nicknames between contractions. The doctor, whose birth system is guaranteed to bring happy, laughing children into the world, lures the babies out with promises of social security numbers and ice cream, as well as endless bad jokes. Slapstick shaving cream battles are dutifully recorded on videotape by the proud Hubie, of course.

*Homeowners' Blues*, slightly less vaudeville, shows the couple calming their doubts by examining the true spirituality of money, and chanting a calming mantra, "eeve, eeve, eeve st. lauren." Their dreams of Givenchy dresses and a wall-size TV

set tactfully hidden by a folding Picasso mural are laughable but quite real to them given the backdrop of their new home's sixteen insect infestations and collapsing ceilings.

The author's witty jabs at our greed and conformity usually surprise and amuse. Where they don't, it is from a combination of punchline overload and a sit-comish overstatement. Cassorla's pacing is sometimes uneven because he hasn't established a clear point to hang his humor on. In the interview provided with the program, he says he is "trying to find his voice and audience," and emphasized his struggle for a way to reconcile "materialistic drives and human drives."

Perhaps, as he continues, he'll find even stronger and stranger material that gives structure and continuity to his comic sense of our self-absorbed conflict. I was impressed, though, by the way

he got us all to laugh in moments of delighted, embarrassed recognition. He could grow into a comic writer who raises questions, and challenges our complacency.

The actors deserve praise; they worked hard to balance scripts through the dances and gestures the plays require. Tim Cox was especially good as a shyster-inspector/exterminator and the laughing Dr. Bengoli. Carol Robinson as Helen did remarkably well tackling the difficulty of giving birth with a script in her hand. The costumes and props were well chosen to give a feeling for the scenes and to make characters clearer.

Cassorla's *Psych Brats* will be the company's next offering on Monday, October 13, at 8 p.m. at the Painted Bride. If you want a lighthearted evening that is finally, intriguingly and uncasily, poised between the Marx

Brothers and Thornton Wilder, Cassorla is worth the \$5 admission. You will at least get "a good yuck" at our moneyed pop culture and an hour of comfortably uncomfortable social consciousness. The reading will be followed by a discussion with the playwright.

If this pair of plays is an indication, Play Work's other programs are worth following. They offer an interesting chance to see the way plays work, and to be involved in the process yourself. Play Works plan two plays a month, usually performed on the first and second Mondays at various theaters throughout the city. They have also begun to produce plays on WXPN on the last Friday of each month. The radio show begins at 2 a.m. for those of us who've rejected the late night slasher movie, and the Monday reading begins at 8 p.m. For locations and information, call 236-8488 for a recorded message. Δ



An odd couple from Albert Cassorla's "Times Two" opening this week at the Playworks.