



nytheatre.com review by Anthony Pennino August 13, 2008

///— a new play by Joe Salvatore about the true ménage-a-trois between Glenway Wescott, Monroe Wheeler, and George Platt Lynes—has premiered this month at FringeNYC. Play and production are both quite strong. Nonetheless, there is room for this script to grow.

Salvatore has created three extremely complicated, complex, and flawed individuals in his piece. Each character resonates; each portrayal is heartfelt. This a play of three equals. The cast is an incredible ensemble with the playwright playing Wescott, John Del Vecchio playing Wheeler, and Daryl Embry playing Lynes. It would do a disservice to this ensemble to point one out over the other two; all serve the play and serve it well. The playwright has taken on a third hat as director and has provided the audience with a highly polished production despite the space and time limitations at FringeNYC. The production is given ample support by the design team: Emily Stork (lighting and projection design), Troy Hourie (scenic design), Traci DiGesù (costume design), and Benjamin Johnson (sound design).

The world of these three men—what Wheeler beautifully and almost tragically insists on calling a "family"—is especially well realized. That notion that these three men are a family is the beating heart of the play. However, it is when this world in small reacts with the world at large that I think there can be improvement. A strong play can be made stronger.

I believe *///* to be true to the essence of Wescott, Wheeler, and Embry. But it is not true to their world. There is a post-Woodstock informality that is present in the characters' style of speech, diction, bearing, and public demeanor. (Fortunately, a campiness in the early scenes quickly evaporates.) The stakes for these three men living their very unique lifestyle—a lifestyle that would raise numerous eyebrows even in today's "tolerant" world—must have been exceedingly high. To be living in a society that would disapprove of them so must have weighed on them almost constantly. And, yet such stakes are only hinted at here or there: a board member at MoMA threatens to have Wheeler removed from his position at the museum. The possibility that Wheeler could be fired is an extremely important crossroads for that character, and yet the matter is left unresolved. Yes, there would have been supportive elements, but most of society would have, at best, been disdainful of them. The play moves from 1919 and 1943. During that time, both the Great Depression and World War II occur. Surely, some element of these two cataclysmic events must have intruded on their lives. Writing a period piece is a juggling act of knowing what historically is helpful and what historically simply gets in the way. Often I could not connect these three individuals with their own time; they were far too contemporary. I believe a more rigorous adherence to the mores and manners of the time as well as the ebb and flow of historical events would serve the piece well. Though most scripts would benefit from judicious cuts, I believe this play would benefit from judicious expansion.

Regardless of the above, *///* is an extremely worthy addition to this year's FringeNYC. If you have only a couple of Fringe shows to see, make sure one of them is *///*.

