

## Theater

# Project Y Gets A Bang Out of 'Boom Boom'

By WILLIAM TRIPLETT  
Special to The Washington Post

Need more proof that some of the most inspired and edgy theater in Washington is coming from young companies working barely above the poverty line? Check out Project Y's production of David Rabe's "In the Boom Boom Room," which just opened at Source Theatre (and is playing the off nights of Source's current production, "Dutchman"). The early-1970s script, a bitter farce that appears to be older than almost all the performers, hasn't aged well. But Project Y reinvigorates it with enough raw energy and promising talent to hold your attention from start to finish.

Like a lot of other writers of his generation, Rabe sees an America that is rotting from the inside, corrupt and corrupting, a soulless bazaar that forces you to be either hustler or sucker. His specialty, though, at least in earlier works, has been the peculiar rules and codes of behavior that must be observed in order to make it in that world.

See THEATER, C5, Col. 1



BY BEN PREMEAUX

From left, Deepa Gupta, Yasmin Tuazon, Sarah Nelson, Caitlin McAndrews and Diane Cooper in the Project Y revival of David Rabe's "In the Boom Boom Room," at Source Theatre.

## A Woman on the Go-Go

THEATER, From C1

Defy or simply misunderstand those rules and codes, as his principal characters often do, and trouble arises. Big, serious, ugly trouble.

Chrissy (Sarah Anika Nelson), a young innocent who wants to make it as a serious dancer, takes a job in a go-go dive in Philadelphia. Start small, work hard, pay your dues, and you'll get ahead: She believes in the American Dream. She also believes in being a totally free spirit. But as her career continues to go nowhere, and she can't ever seem to look like those fabulous women she sees in magazines, and all the people in her life increasingly just use her, Chrissy turns to therapy and astrology to help her make sense of a seemingly senseless world. Suffice to say things only get worse.

"Boom Boom" has an unerring sense of satire. One of Chrissy's boyfriends is in therapy, but not, he insists, because he has lots of problems: "I just have this difficult time living." One of Chrissy's neighbors is a gay man, of whom she says, "He's like a girl but he's not, so you can trust him." But the play's satire is also, in a way, unending: In addition to homosexuality and naivete, Rabe takes on racism, child sex abuse, family dysfunction, abortion and promiscuity, among other matters. His attempts to link them are little more than cursory; instead they just feel lugged in for shock value, which doubtless registered some impact 30 years

ago. We can still be interested in it. She locks onto the script's two strengths—twisted humor and theatrical construction—and makes the show into a wonderful sort of absurdist odyssey. She doesn't seem interested in shocking anyone with social problems, but rather in exploring the emotional havoc they wreak on Chrissy. In fact, you see in the often wittily choreographed movement a sort of sly but not condescending wink acknowledging that parts of the material are dated.

As Chrissy, Nelson is notable for the stubborn and near-surreal innocence she conveys: Think Gidget given a hit of acid when she wasn't looking. As Guy, the gay neighbor, Dan Via gives the deliberately stereotypical part some edge and soul. Grady Weatherford plays Al, Chrissy's truck-driving boyfriend, as a tough lowlife who's not as tough as he thinks, while Jay Dunn turns in a remarkable performance as Ralphie, a blissfully stupid loser.

Hats off to Krissy Kelly's costume design, which evokes the era in all its glorious excess (patent leather boots, hot pants, body paint) without drawing too much attention to itself. Much like the entire production, the costumes have a cohesive and shrewd sensibility that is sometimes lacking at bigger and richer theaters.

*In the Boom Boom Room*, by David Rabe. Directed by Michole Biancosino. Lighting, Mike Daniels; sound, Amit Prakash; set, Ben Premeaux. With Scott Mc-

### Music

## Adding S

NSO, Conductor Han

By JOSEPH McLELLAN  
Special to The Washington Post

"I would like to go out with a big bang," said Marvin Hamlisch, principal pops conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra, introducing the final pops concert in the NSO's subscription season. His wish was more than fulfilled yesterday afternoon in the Kennedy Center Concert Hall. The program ended with scores of patrons dancing in the aisles, including at least one woman on crutches, as the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, backed by the NSO, played a swinging "When the Saints Go Marching In."

Although not specifically labeled as such, the program was essentially a tribute to traditional African American music (pre-rap; in fact, pre-pop)—that is, the music that has given American music its distinctive flavor. Before the Preservation Hall Jazz Band (one of three New Orleans bands that travel under that name) came on after intermission, the first half of the program was dominated by baritone Jubilant Sykes singing three spirituals—most memorably his own arrangement of "Were You There?"—and two of Aaron Copland's "Old American Songs." Sykes has a multifaceted voice, a strong sense of the drama inherent in the words and music he sings, and an ultra-sophisticated microphone technique that can make his one voice do the work of several in passages of dialogue or contrast. His spirituals were an intense experience, and his animal noises in Copland's "I Bought Me a Cat" were phantasmagoric.

It was fairly easy to predict most of what the Preservation Hall band would play: "Basin Street Blues," "St. Louis Blues" and "Just a Closer

## Soprano So

By TIM PAGE  
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