ll in the Family

ılian-American Reconciliation
John Patrick Shanley
rected by Richard Romagnoli
the Source Theatre to Oct. 10

Committed to producing "high-impact" theater for audiences who wouldn't be caught dead umming an Andrew Lloyd Webber tune, Project Y regularly crosses p expectations in everything except s high production quality. But after gitprop about dead schoolgirls, nd-of-empire rants about British xplorers, and now an uproarious, iddily performed comic romance y John Patrick Shanley—*Italian Imerican Reconciliation*—the question arises: Is there nothing to which his company won't affix its own hip rand of "impact"?

Shanley, after all, is the guy who vrote *Moonstruck*. He's a sentimenalist by inclination—linguistically clever, but pure mush at center—and his tale of a lovesick Brooklyn lad, his macho buddy, and the women they adore is not at first (or even second) blush the sort of thing you'd think would be attracting a troupe that sprang from the loins of the left-leaning, ferociously political Potomac Theatre Project.

Still, with a spare, fairy-tale staging by PTP co-founder Richard Romagnoli, Project Y's *Reconciliation* is a romp to be reckoned with—audience-involving, vivid, rambunctious, and alternately hilarious and affecting. It begins with a prayer by a charismatic hail-fellow-well-met type named Aldo (Eric Sutton) to the Virgin Mary, followed by a risky but beautifully handled chat with the audience that evolves into the story of how he got waaay-over-his-head-involved in the romantic troubles of his best friend, Huey (Peter Makrauer), a divorced guy whose ex-wife (Michole Biancosino) has a violent streak and whose current girlfriend (Caroline Kellogg) is a living doll.

Huey, much to Aldo's amazement, is stuck on the witch and unable to accept the love of the princess. What's a bud to do?

Well, I should probably let you discover that for yourself. Suffice it to say that gunshots are fired, tears cried, bromides uttered, and plans undone, pretty much ideally. It's not deep, but it's enormous fun, especially with Romagnoli's supremely visual staging emphasizing fantasy elements at every turn. When Huey's ex-wife is revealed at the beginning of Act 2, she's quite literally shrouded in mystery, and as the shrouds come unwrapped, revealing her in a funereal robe over a shimmering blood-red gown, it's clear that naturalism isn't what's intended.

Designer Matt Soule's candlelit shrine and upside-down Greek columns place the events in a pleasantly imprecise New York City of the imagination, even as the acting locates us more exactly in sitcom territory. Sutton's garrulous, ingratiatingly grating Aldo is the evening's crowd pleaser, but all the others are terrific. Kellogg and Makrauer are appealingly passionate and wide-eyed as the two lovers who are so clearly made for each other that they're fated to break up early and often. Biancosino imbues Huey's angry ex with enormous pain, somehow managing to make an alienating character intriguing. And Suzanne Richard is a delight as Aunt May, adding a welcome shot of vinegar to her delivery whenever the author requires her to mouth platitudes about love and devotion that would choke an archbishop. **CP**