

# Style

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## 'Reconciliation': Amore the Merrier

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If you've seen the movie "Moonstruck," you know that writer John Patrick Shanley's take on love runs from the ridiculous to the sublime. His characters are tortured; they don't know what's happening to them, but they know that they're being consumed. In Shanley's "Italian American Reconciliation," written around the same time (and in the same spirit) as "Moonstruck," a woman is asked whether she actually loves the guy she's agonizing over.

"Yeah," she moans. "To the best of my knowledge."

This is funny business, and the Source Theatre-Project Y co-production (at Source) of "Italian American Reconciliation" doesn't miss a punch line. As Aldo Scalicki, our guide through the evening's funhouse of love, Eric Sutton warms up the audience with an opening monologue that has him shaking hands with the guys and flirting with the girls, and he's disarmingly funny. Aldo is a gregarious Italian American, and Sutton plays him with a thick accent and wild gesturing hands. He's a passionate pup in a cool Italian suit.

Shanley has called the play a fable, and Aldo self-consciously takes the stage to tell the cautionary tale of his pal Huey and Huey's ex-wife, Janice. Huey's a mess: Dressed in what looks

like 17th-century peasant clothing, he writes turgid poetry by candlelight and yearns for the woman who shot his dog (yes, his ex-wife Janice).

Aldo tries to talk Huey out of trying to get Janice back, but their long, confessional conversation leads to a renunciation of their learned masculine foolishness. They will embrace the hazards of love. They will risk the wrath of Janice. They will make a plan.

Janice is a phantom in Act 1. The audience never sees her, but she is talked about as if she's a cross between Lorena Bobbitt and the Blair Witch. You can't wait to meet this supposedly terrifying woman, and director Richard Romagnoli has three actors literally unwrap her at the beginning of Act 2. (The audience has to clear the auditorium for the effect to be set up.)

It's a tad much, as is the devotional overlay of the production, complete with candles at the feet of a religious icon in the corner of the stage. (Matthew Soule designed this show's trappings around Greg Mitchell's set for Source's "A Life in the Theater," opening on the same stage this weekend.) When Micholè Biancosino appears as Janice, dressed by costume designer Rhonda Key in coven wear—scarlet dress; black hooded robe—it's clear that Romagnoli is going all the way with Shanley's fable angle. Standing amid cracked pedestals, the characters look like opera figures writ small, es-

pecially when Huey the peasant boy comes wooing.

The script calls for the actors to pour their hearts out again and again in what Shanley likely thinks of as arias, and once in a while the performance gets a little overwrought. Still, the young cast looks good more often than not for two reasons. First, Project Y likes scripts that can be acted aggressively. Second, Romagnoli—a mentor to most of the young talent that recently formed Project Y—keeps the actors attuned to the play's constant shifts between comedy and drama. There is a tenderness to all the raw hearts on display, and quips are delivered with sensitivity to the overall mood.

Biancosino turns out to be a fine Janice—menacing and manipulative at first, but ultimately as human as the rest of the crowd. Peter Makrauer is sensitive and lost (if occasionally a bit too soft-spoken) as Huey. Caroline Kellogg plays Teresa, Huey's new gal, and though she initially pushes her character's brave swagger, she settles nicely into the intense swing of things once Teresa gets dumped by Huey.

The show's ace in the hole is Suzanne Richard as a wise widow, Aunt May. Her common sense is typically expressed in wonderfully puncturing jokes that take some of the hot air out of the overinflated young lovers.

But only some: Shanley loves to ride the roiling waters of young romance. The last thing he



PROJECT Y THEATRE COMPANY

Eric Sutton in a co-production of Source and Project Y, "Italian American Reconciliation."

wants is for his entertaining characters to get over it.

**Italian American Reconciliation**, by John Patrick Shanley. Directed by Richard Romagnoli. Lights, Marianne Meadows. Approximately two hours. Through Oct. 10 at Source Theatre, 1835 14th St. NW. Call 202-462-1073.