



From left, Christina Anderson, Jon Cohn, and Tyson Lien appear in *Lion in the Streets*.

The *Lion* awakens

New theater troupe makes its debut with a loud roar

by Frank Cunat

Lion in the Streets, the debut offering from D.C.'s new Project Y, is a moving, thoughtful production of a challenging play.

Director Michole Biancosino explains that the play, by Canadian writer Judith Thompson, puts forward a "domino theory" of oppression in which minor characters in each scene, who are put down by others, become the central characters in the next scene and continue the cycle. The basis for the many oppressions depicted here is often a characteristic like sexual orientation, race, class, or religious background (in a play filled with religious references).

Biancosino, a co-founder of Project Y, has chosen a play full of good acting moments. It follows a young Portuguese immigrant, Isobel, (Deanna Harris) as she tries to find what she variously calls "home" and "heaven," and slowly realizes why no one appears to notice her.

On her journey she sees a child care worker (Sarah Bragin), a troubled priest (Tyson Lien), a Gay waiter (Jon Cohn), a PTA volunteer (Christina Anderson), and a mother with cancer (Lindsay Allen). To the credit of director and cast, while many of these roles could be stereotypes, the actors find the layers of emotion beneath the surface.

All the actors except Harris play multiple roles, and

standouts include Bragin as a cerebral palsy patient and Lien as a timid researcher who undergoes an unusual Gay-bashing. Lien's connection with his role is so complete the audience can almost feel his physical pain. Although Allen as a jealous wife could stand to pull back on her hysteria, in most cases the actors show a remarkable degree of control considering how completely they're committed to their roles.

Unfortunately, the character of Isobel is so passive that the audience can get caught up by the kaleidoscopic supporting characters, forgetting whose story the play is supposed to tell. There isn't very much director Biancosino can do about that, although she does try to involve Harris in the action of long scenes that focus on other characters.

Amit Prakash's sound design, while not extensive, conveys a sense of unresolved urban confusion. David McKeever's spare set, involving flowing white sheets and, in some scenes, swings, adds a celestial background to Isobel's journey.

Any theater company this impressive in its debut is worth watching. ▼

Lion in the Streets runs through Dec. 18, and from Jan. 6-Feb. 5, at DCAC, 2438 18th St. NW. For tickets, call (202) 462-7833.