

'In the Boom Boom Room' vibrates on stage

By HELEN ZUCKER

David Rabe's play "In the Boom Boom Room," at Oakland University's Barn Theatre, pulses with life. Strong acting and good direction by Randall Forte, pulls this work about confusions, mostly sexual, into an evening of highly enjoyable theater.

For those with an appetite for works by new American playwrights, this production should not be missed.

Kim Rust as Chrissy, the confused ex-checker at the A&P who becomes a go-go dancer, is believable and moving. The play revolves around Chrissy's growth from a girl with "dances in her head" (a girl whose highest ambition is to make the centerfold of a glamorous magazine) into an embittered young woman who repeats the pattern of her mother's marriage, and then takes off for the

Review

Big Apple to become a masked dancer.

Chrissy never does find out who she is or what she can become. Rabe's indirect comment on Chrissy's limited options make this a sad and moving work.

HAL ROBINSON as Harold, Chrissy's father, turns in a subtle performance. He rounds out his role with wonderful nuances and deadpan expressions that convey worlds of grief.

Beth Taylor, a very gifted actress, is strong as Susan, the head girl in the

Philadelphia bar Chrissy works in. Ms. Taylor gives a finely modulated performance. She comes on soft as well as tough. She can sing and dance as well as she acts.

I have nothing but praise for Pat Hloek, Karen Swantek and Julie Malama as the dancers. The hardness of their young faces, the hard gestures of their young, supple bodies was just right. Whores in the making is what Rabe's script calls for, and that's exactly what these dancers create.

High in her cage, Pat Hloek, doing the Monkey, does a clever bit, pulling bananas from trees in the air. She speaks her few lines with the same agility. Life is hard for these girls—their dances reflect their lives.

Morris Weinger is very lively as Guy, Chrissy's neighbor who wants to share the treasures of his mind and

who can find no one who wants to partake of them.

GUY AND CHRISSEY have a wonderful fight, leaving pillows and magazines around the stage to help each other out of a "screamer"; i.e. the pits. The way this play works, they hurt more than help each other.

Steve Blackwood is electrifying as Ralphie, the hood who tells Chrissy she will "hear her father's voice." Every time he comes onstage, magic happens.

Frank Keils is terrific as Al, Chrissy's intelligent, uneducated, drifting, semi-criminal boyfriend. Keils rises to the demands of the toughest role in the play. Al is a confused man. Keils is that man.

AS WE WAZCH, he is transformed into a frustrated hulk, a twitching

lump who is against "good nutrition" for blacks. He fears the rising black man will sweep him away.

Al is a man threatened on all sides, not only by his lack of family, but by his inability to hold a wife, a job. He can't even control his childhood terrors.

His memories of brutality at the hands of black gangs is too strong to erase. He carries his brute past around with him, and it consumes his present and his future.

The best scene in the play belongs to Keils. In the final act, Keils comes into his own, as Al and Chrissy (now his wife) have their last knock-out, dragout fight.

Martha Kent is wonderful in the role of Helen, Chrissy's plump, frightened mother. Her dime-store bathrobe is just right. She is the woman who can't

see beyond a man taking care of her—the woman who makes chocolate pudding while worlds fall apart under her feet. Ms. Kent's scene with Harold and Chrissy is a high moment.

Barterner George Seedorff, Mel Gilroy as The Man, and the actors who make up the bar patrons are all sure-footed performers.

High credits to Johanna Lubkowski and the costume crew. The lighting, designed by Tom Aston, is intelligent and inventive. Janet Platt, assistant director, stage manager and head of the lighting crew, deserves kudos.

The finale, a fast series of blips—flickering darks to brights—is magic. This is ambitious theater.

The play runs Friday-Sunday at the theater on the OU campus in Rochester.

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Oriandello is a professor at Western Illinois University and specializes in film, drama and literature. He received his MA and Ph.D. from the University of Michigan.

Knope is the associate director of the division of film and photography at the Midland Center for the Arts. He

received a BA in journalism from the University of Wisconsin and an MA from the London Film School of London, England.

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