



THE ROUND OF PLEASURE

The New Stage Theatre Company at Clemente Soto Vélaz Cultural Center

A bleakly satiric and demeaning view of humanity and its sexual appetites is given full rein in *The Round of Pleasure* by Austrian playwright Werner Schwab.

Schwab—an award-winning controversial writer who died in 1994 at age 36—based his work on the 1903 play *Reigen* by fellow Austrian Arthur Schnitzler. Schnitzler's play is probably better known as *La Ronde*, the title of the classic 1950 French movie version and the one most often used in modern productions.

Under Ildiko Nemeth's direction, the show details a chain of 10 sexual episodes. Couples mate and part, a partner in one episode coupling with a new one in the following scene, until the final character links up with a lover from the first segment. However, don't expect to be titillated. Elaborately staged, the show resembles a grotesque circus, with sex seen as either an act of aggression or accommodation. Couplings are frantic, unpleasantly mechanical and abstract. Artificial penises of various sizes and forms get passed from male to female. Clothed in fantasy costumes and isolated from each other, the players quiver and squirm their way to orgasm. In between scenes, the actors stiffly scurry about to loud recorded music under chiaroscuro lighting, heightening the sense of a robotic carnival.

With characterizations treated almost as mechanically as the sex, it all becomes quickly and uncomfortably predictable, despite the brash humor of the quirky dialogue. Schwab was known for his intentional mangling of the German language, and translator Michael Mitchell emulates this.

The 10 actors carry out the sexual pantomimes vigorously, and some display touches of affecting life. Catherine Correa and Kaylin Lee Clinton bring vivacity to their respective portrayals as a hard-edged prostitute and imperious actress. Charles Finney is an impressively full-voiced presence as an amorous landlord. But any hints of personality or pleasure are overshadowed by the show's questionable main accomplishment—removing sexiness from sex.

*Presented by the New Stage Theatre Company
at Clemente Soto Vélaz Cultural Center, 107 Suffolk St., NYC.
Nov. 14–Dec. 16. Wed.–Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 5 p.m.
(212) 868-4444 or www.smartix.com.*

Reviewed by Ron Cohen

Published on BackStage.com on November 14, 2007.

Copyright 2007 The Nielsen Company. All rights reserved.