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Werner Schwab's "The Round of Pleasure" by Larry Litt

The Round of Pleasure by Werner Schwab
Translated from German by Michael Mitchell
Clemente Soto Velez (CSV), 107 Suffolk
Street, NYC (between Rivington and
Delancey)

**Presented by The New Stage Theatre
Company, Founder/Artistic Director Ildiko
Lujza Nemeth**

Choreography by Julie Atlas Muz
At Clemente Soto Velez, 107 Suffolk St, NYC
November 10 to December 16, 2007

**SMARTTIX (212) 868-4444 or www.
newstagetheatre.org**

Reviewed by Larry Litt November 14, 2007



THE ROUND OF PLEASURE -- Catherine
Correa (Prostitute) & Peter Schmitz (Member
of Parliament).

We have playwrights like Werner Schwab in this country. Playwrights who see through all the major and minor hypocrisies of our contemporary lives. But can they tell their stories without schmaltz, without making you want to cry? Because our American version of the human condition is that somewhere there's a better life for us? Yeah right. Not any more.

That's why for me The New Stage Theatre Company's production of Schwab's "The Round of Pleasure" is a Viennese treat, a rich dessert from Mittel Europa that breaks all the artificially imposed rules of political correctness. This is anti-Kushner to a stylistic extreme. 'Round' has no social conscience, while also having as complete a picture of

society's moral hypocrisies and ethical duplicities as one can get in an hour and a half.

Director Ildeko Nemeth puts her beautiful ensemble through gigantic hoops of pleasure and pain, desire and repulsion, frustration and consummation. Yes, there are orgasms and psychogasms to relieve the tension both onstage and in the audience. She knows how to bring an audience to a fevered pitch, then burst their expectations with a falsetto cry of delight. Or is it a faked climax useful for paying the rent?

What is sex for? Schwab's play is audibly clear. As expected, both men and women use sex for power, but also to haul away the stale redundancies of their mittel class EU lives. Just you dare to seduce someone. If you succeed you'll end up paying a very high price both financially and personally for a long time. Europe still has a memory, unlike ever reborn America.

Sex is a tool. No children please. We're busy getting what we want for ourselves. Even if it's just a personal moment of power for an penilely handicapped Executive (Galway McCullough) over a fiery prostitute (Catherine Correa). Mc Cullough is indeed powerfully convincing as a typically unlikable businessman whose ego is wrapped up in causing women pain. His penis is so small that Ms Correa can't find it at first. Her brilliant clowning and miming turns to brilliant Latina diablo anger as her Executive John refuses to pay. It's one of the funniest pay-for-sex scenes I've ever seen. Both actors belong to each other in their pleasure-pain dance. But as always money is power. Corruption turns to anger. But what can a poor working girl do?

The same happens to the innocent Hairdresser (Jeanne Lauren Smith) when she encounters a marriage proposal from her client, The Executive. Suddenly, two sides of the businessman's persona are revealed, both tainted by sexual inadequacy. This is the beginning of the daisy chain story line that links the characters and scenes.

Schwab moves on to the real estate world with intense pleading dialog between The Landlord (Charles Finney), also a philosopher, and his fantastically sexy tenant The Young Married Woman (Sarah Lemp). They do the dance of rent reduction as only an experienced woman of the world can follow. No surprising proposition tonight. She knows, he knows, there's no economic mystery, just lust and deferred payment. How philosophical, how efficient.

Her ethically challenged but very horny Husband (Markus Hirnigel) gets himself into hysterical trouble with his new, coy but ultimately willing Secretary (Nicole Hafner). Markus and Nicole also dance a very push-pull routine of words and gestures that are at once brutally psychosexual and rewarding. He dominates of course. Bosses always do in comedy as in real life.

He goes home to his uncaring wife for a quick hop in the sack only to discover she needs to personally degrade him first. And why not? They both have been intimate with many others. What's left but a nasty bit of name calling foreplay by people who know each other too well. It isn't bickering, or verbal warfare. It's a brilliantly funny balancing act between a married couple testing their strengths and weaknesses. And very sexy when they finally succumb to the exquisite mental torture. My God, I so wanted to join them.

Schwab has a special place in Heaven or Hell reserved for actresses. The Actress (Kaylin Lee Clinton) seduces and beguiles with craft, style and deliberation. Yes sex is the commodity, but also the point of her life. Her tryst with the debased, young, re-emerging Writer (John Rosania) reminds me of rumors about Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller. Beauty and the Depressed Beast may work for a while, but eventually beauty wants more than intellectual angst after sex. Especially since words don't pay the bills.

When the Member of Parliament (Peter B. Schmitz) arrives to claim his sexual favor from The Actress, any vestiges of idealism are trashed. Politics of revolution and sexual cronyism meet for an encounter between truth and demand. "Remember that little favor I need from you. Talk to the Minister for me," is the imperative, collusive refrain after bizarre secretive sex. Everything has it's price in "Round of Pleasure." It's an open market for all who are willing to pay the price.

In an astounding overture, between scenes, and in an amazing closing, choreographer Julie Atlas Muz's 'Ironic Interludes' add to the chaos of human bodily relations. Strauss waltzes set the place as Vienna, while original music by Paul Radelat add dynamic motion and frenetic pace. The dances are exquisite examples of how to integrate acting and movement while maintaining a story line's integrity.

Costumes by Jessica Sofia Mitrani and Marguerite Lochard set the characters apart from dreaded realism. Without the stylized costumes we'd be watching a cheap sex show on late night Eurovision.

Ildeko Nemeth creates a brutal world of sexual intrigue and intense characters for us to enjoy. Her company treats Schwab's work as a European phenomenon. But secretly, we all know it can and does happen here.



L-R: Sarah Lemp (Young Married Woman), John Rosania (Writer), Kaylin Lee Clinton (Actress).

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