

Fine Arts Review—Off-Broadway

TWO HEARTS OVER EASY at Actors' Playhouse

Air Dates: 3/26-4/1/94

TWO HEARTS OVER EASY, Robert Cabell's seriocomic musical, has developed from its prototype seen last March at Don't Tell Mama into a full-fledged production now running at the Actors' Playhouse in Greenwich Village. If anything, it is even more charmingly engaging than in its previous incarnation.

Textually, the show remains much the same: two cousins, a straight woman and a gay man, meet at their monthly brunch to dish (and not infrequently dispute) over the swirl of activity in their careers and relationships. Conveniently, they've both been jettisoned by their respective mates, thus allowing for a generous amount of spoken and sung shoulder-drenching. Although sometimes it skids into the slight or the overly cutesy, the show is, nonetheless, very often a buoyantly entertaining mix of punchy melodies, whipcrack comedy, and arresting emotional honesty. In particular, Cabell has scored with one number that will doubtless be singled out by most who review the show: "With The Last Breath I Breathe" is almost overwhelming in its eloquent expression of love by a man with A.I.D.S. to his lover, and is virtually certain to become omnipresent in cabaret acts in the coming months. Cabell's strengths as a lyricist are also amply evident in the one song added for this staging, the dramatic solo "Mirror Mirror on the Wall."

Of the four performers, three are newly cast for this production. While Bill Ebbesmeyer lacks some of the internal gravitas Cabell brought to the male lead when he played the role himself at Mama's, he does have quite an ingratiating presence and quickly becomes irresistably appealing. And Melanie Demitri is simply splendid as the other cousin, equally touching in her vulnerability and exciting in her vivacity with a knockout singing voice. But, it is Maggie Wirth as the waitress and confidant to the two leads (as well as several other characters) who just about carried the audience home with her in her Eddie Bauer bag. True, the character is one of those lovable, wisecracking babes designed to steal a show, but ~~that~~ shouldn't be held against Wirth's stellar timing and skill. It's only Randy Weiss, the one holdover from the showcase, who comes up short. His indisputable energy still cannot entirely make up for a lack of vocal and comic technique in his multiple roles.

Kudos should also be heaped upon a dazzlingly versatile lighting design by Bob Kneeland (wisely kept on from Mama's), classy costumes by Maggie Anderson, and a warmly cozy set design by Tristan Wilson.

TWO HEARTS OVER EASY is running at the Actor's Playhouse on Seventh Avenue South just below Grove Street. It'll earn both the smile on your face AND the tear in your eye. For WRSU-FM, this is John Michael Koroly.