



Pisces Moon Productions Presents

Swimming in the Shallows

By Adam Bock

Directed by Susan Myer

"a whimsical bauble of romantic theater" - Santa Cruz Sentinel

Plays February 20 through march 20, 2004

"a tightly knit production, and the action zips along with never a drop in the energy level" - Good Times Entertainment Weekly, February 26, 2004

"Deep, funny and surreal" - Register-Pajaronian, February 26th, 2004

About the Play

In a clever, quirky romp through relationships and their attendant woes, Pisces Moon Productions offers up Adam Bock's "Swimming in the Shallows" at Actors' Theatre. This social satire is set in Twig, Rhode Island, where three couples are at a crossroads. Barb, inspired by a "Readers' Digest" article on Buddhism, is trying to detach from all her possessions. Will that include her husband, Bob? Carla Carla is agonizing over whether to marry her partner, Donna, who promises to quit smoking while finding elaborate ways to sneak cigarettes. Is this a sign of something more malevolent, or does it even matter? Nick, whose love life is a string of empty encounters with "unavailable" men, has fallen for the ultimate predator, a Mako shark. Will they find love, or another doomed one-night stand?

Like Bock's "Five Flights," which Pisces Moon assayed last year at this time, "Swimming in the Shallows" is a sweetly poignant comedy. The characters couldn't be more familiar or their problems more ordinary until the plot takes a sharp, sudden turn into surrealism -- without, surprisingly, losing its believability. "Swimming in the Shallows" upholds Pisces Moon's reputation to challenge and provoke, but does it with a light and gentle hand. It's quick, funny and ingenious, but manages to bring our loves, losses, friendships and foibles into sharp focus.

The playwright, Adam Bock, is a Canadian who once lived in Rhode Island and is now living in San Francisco. The Shotgun Players first produced "Swimming in the Shallows" there, where it won the 1999 Bay Area Theater Critics Circle Awards for Best Original Script, Ensemble and Production. It has since been produced all over the United States, and abroad in England and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

CAST

Becky Armor: Barb
Heather Brown-Huber: Donna
Norma Calderon: Carla Carla
Lou DeLucia: Bob
Zachary Krone: The Shark
Christopher Sugarman: Nick

CREW

Susan Myer: Director
Susan Myer and Christopher Sugarman: Co-Producers
Terri Steinmann: Associate Producer
Mary Comfort: Dramaturg

Django Hulphers: Light Design
Django Hulphers: Set Design
Lyndsey Gould: Stage Manager
Tiffany White: Production Assistant
Andy Botsford: Technical Consultant
Susan Myer: Marketing and Public Relations

Full Reviews for Pisces Moon Productions' presentation of Adam Bock's *Swimming in the Shallows*.

Santa Cruz Sentinel – February 26, 2004

A 'Shallow' production swims with perfect timing

By ANN BENNETT

SENTINEL Theater critic

Pisces Moon, a company that has challenged audiences and has gained a devoted following over the past few years for its strong, edgy productions, has turned its attention to lighter themes, and is now offering a whimsical bauble of romantic theater to counter those February blues.

With splendid timing, Pisces Moon's new play, "Swimming in the Shallows," celebrates a lesbian marriage as the central story in a trio of relationship vignettes that explore love and commitment with emphasis on the queer, the quirky and the quixotic.

Playwright Adam Bock's lively look at unlikely couplings is described as a "social satire," but it is less a serious satire than a humorous and sometimes fairly clever parody of how we partner up and, best of all, it lightly spoofs the ways we deal with the realities of those partnerings.

Couple No. 1 is the most promising. The two young women are contemplating their upcoming "commitment ceremony," one (the proposer) with happy anticipation that is clouded by her anguish at not being able to quit smoking for her lover, and the other with hope that is undercut by her fear that she is unable to accept her partner's bad habit.

Despite the amusing scenes that deal with Donna's attempts to quit smoking and Carla's attempts to reconcile herself to the issue, the play's focus finally suggests that the couple will be capable of surmounting this; love, after all, must acknowledge the individuality of two separate people who comprise the couple.

The recognition and acceptance of individual differences is also the issue of couple number two, a heterosexual couple whose marriage begins to disintegrate when Barb, inspired by an article about Buddhist monks, decides to seek happiness in simplicity and proceeds to disassociate herself from most of her worldly possessions, presumably including her husband. The third couple isn't really a couple at all — at least at the start.

Nick, a rampantly active gay man who yearns for a true relationship that never materializes from his sequential couplings with inappropriate partners, finally finds himself deeply in love with a magnificent — are you ready for this? — shark. The Shark's motivations in this unlikely relationship are not clear, and the symbolism suggested by the scenario of the sweetly yearning Nick and the ultimate predator boggles the mind. Director Susan Myer takes this blended three-part comedy to its fullest with nicely abrupt timing and sketchy short scenic impressions. It's not so much a play as an intertwining of emotions, and Myer recognizes the value of juxtaposition as her characters interact and extract, giving and seeking advice, explaining and doubting motivations, and, mostly, wistfully hoping for lasting love.

Norma Calderon is delightful as Carla, convincingly committed while uncertain about what that actually involves. Her excellent stage presence is warm, and she projects her emotions with fine expression and particularly clever and subtle comedy.

As her partner, Donna, Heather Huber-Brown bubbles and bounces with vitality and insecurity, making the most of some very funny dialogue and clearly enjoying every opportunity to pull off the visual gags of body language.

Christopher Sugarman is at his best in a role that could have been created just for him. He flirts, he sulks, he pouts and he eagerly dreams of finding true love. His interactions with each of the others are uniquely individualized, and he neatly develops each exchange to match the mood. Whether sincerely considering questions or passionately responding to his own dreams, Sugarman is always fun to watch.

Zack Krone plays the Shark with charming ambivalence. Is he the culmination of Nick's hopes or just another opportunist? In his aquarium he's a frustrated predator, on a park bench he's a romantic — but not too bright — possibility. Can love conquer the Shark's natural inclinations or will the Shark devour his own chance for happiness?

Darned if I can tell.

As Barb, the newly determined minimalist, Becky Armor disclaims and exclaims with an air of defiance, but she also cares for the

tribulations of her more interesting friends. Armor seems often mildly distracted by something not obvious in the play; perhaps it's part of the detachment problem she faces. Her comedy is tougher and so is she, a less optimistic searcher for fulfillment. As her husband, Lou DeLucia clearly provides the reasons for her dissatisfaction.

Django Hulphers spare set is perfect for the play — and the aquarium is both lovely and ominous, as is the play.

"Swimming in the Shallows" is, on the surface, a romantic comedy. But of course nothing is that simple, and neither is this. It's a lot of fun and very amusing and cleverly presented, and by the end of the play you may have some idea why these folks stay in the shallows rather than brave deeper water.

Contact Ann Bennett at svreeken@santacruzsentinel.com.

If You Go

WHAT: 'Swimming in the Shallows.'

WHERE: The Actors' Theatre, 1001 Center St., Santa Cruz.

WHEN: 7 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays; 3 p.m. Sundays through March 28.

TICKETS: \$15, \$12 seniors and students; Thursdays are two-for-one.

DETAILS: 425-PLAY or www.piscesmoon.org.

Good Times Entertainment Weekly - February 26, 2004

Not So Shallow

Deep, funny and surreal, 'Swimming in the Shallows' probes the joys and pitfalls of relationships

By Christa Martin

On opening night at every Pisces Moon Productions play, there's one woman who never misses the show—director Susan Myer. She slips into a seat and her demeanor is cool, yet she must feel a little tense. After all, her reputation rides on the actors. If they falter, Myer takes some blame. If they prevail—as they have every show thus far since the company's inception in 2000—she gets the kudos then disappears as the applause is rendered to the cast.

Myer is a talented female director, a powerful presence capable of crafting memorable shows. (She also co-produces each play alongside her must-have business partner-actor Christopher Sugarman.) The duo's latest endeavor, a comedy called "Swimming in the Shallows," opened last weekend to a full house and runs through March 14 at Santa Cruz's Actors' Theatre. It's another go-see, but this round strays away from high drama and delivers some surrealism. It also includes a few gay issues.

It's Myer's creative vision that allows people to appreciate her shows. And there's a great deal to appreciate in "Swimming in the Shallows." Myer and Sugarman often choose winning scripts and the relentless research and preparation they both bring to rehearsals stand out. But Myer also incorporates an amalgam of acting/directing techniques, something one of her actors, Lou Delucia, calls, "her passion."

"Swimming in the Shallows" is Delucia's first Pisces Moon show. He says the company is a combination of professional theater and community theater: professional because of its material and the willingness of Myer and Sugarman to go out on the edge; community because at the same time, everyone is pulling his or her own weight. Through working with Myer, Delucia says he's learned to trust his instincts and trust his past training.

"She's like a little kid with this," Delucia says. "She really wants it to happen. She gets up there and gets her hands dirty. She has a basic passion for the work and that's what comes out."

Delucia has a smaller role within the sextet of actors here. As Bob, he plays the estranged husband of Barb, played beautifully by Becky Armor in one of her best performances. Although Delucia's time onstage is brief, he maintains a strong presence. His character has severe marital spats with Barb—one in particular over her sudden desire to sell all their belongings—Barb came to this epiphany after reading an article in Readers Digest about how some Buddhists trimmed down their belongings to just eight items. She's determined to apply that principle to her own life, and of course, Bob is miffed.

Simultaneously, Barb's friend Nick (Sugarman) is something of a playboy who just can't find the man of his dreams. So he falls in love with a shark. This is where things get a bit surreal in the play, yet Myer handles it with grace. We are gently transitioned from reality to surrealism and don't even question it. The shark is in an aquarium where Nick's

other friend Donna (Heather Huber-Brown) works. Donna introduces shark and man. (Hang in there with me.) Soon, our talking shark (Zach Krone) puts his predator-like moves on Nick. Krone is a delight to watch on stage—he's buff and handsome and his acting style is natural. Sugarman, who's been doing drama for a long time, shows us just how versatile and skilled an actor he is here—his comedic flair is downright impressive.

Rounding out the story—and the cast—is a third storyline—two lesbians preparing for their marriage/commitment ceremony. The timing of this play perfectly coincides with the current events happening in San Francisco with gay marriage. Donna is a chain-smoking, high-strung young woman. Her fiancé Carla Carla (Norma Calderon)—yes, she has the same first and last name—has a severe dislike for Donna's smoking habit. Drama happens.

"Swimming in the Shallows" follows the lives of these six people, their idiosyncrasies, their conflicts and their love for one another. On the outside it looks like a quirky sitcom type of play, which it is. But it's also so much more. It's a romp in the bed with two handsome men. It's about a sad woman who is losing her husband. It's the spats between lesbian lovers as they plan their wedding. It's a look at how possessions rule our lives and how some people have a hard time taking love seriously. It's a lot of things, but what it isn't, is shallow. What it is ... is deep, yet another play scribed by Adam Bock, who also wrote "Five Flights," another Pisces Moon favorite from last year. And it's also another successful product of Myer's imagination, coupled with strong sets by Django Hulphers and the luscious fashion sense of Sugarman and Tiffany White. Not to be forgotten—'80s retro tunes play before and throughout the show, which puts the audience in the mood for some entertainment, and that's just what they receive, with a touch of challenge and a dose of social issues.

These are all themes Myer appreciates—and handles well.

"Like everything we do it has a message," Myer says. "I think [having a message] is the difference between entertainment and art. You can go to the movies and you can be entertained, but art is different. Art is going to dig its way right inside you and it's going to inspire you. ... This [play and other Pisces Moon shows] is people putting it out there ... in that little room, even just for one night, where emotions are being shared between people and the audience, and back to each other. It's that experience of art."

"Swimming in the Shallows" runs through March 14 at the Actors' Theatre, 1001 Center St., Santa Cruz. Times: 8 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays; 3 p.m. on Sunday March 7 and 14. Tickets: \$15/gen.; \$12/seniors and students. Thursdays are two-for-one admission for \$15. For more info, call 425-PLAY.

Register-Pajaronian – February 27, 2004

Pisces Moon's 'Swimming in the Shallows' anything but shallow

Feb 27 2004 12:00AM By

By JOYCE D. MANN

FOR THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Set in Rhode Island, Adam Bock's "Swimming in the Shallows" is a play about relationships. Bear in mind that this is a Pisces Moon production, so don't expect to see your run-of-the-mill relationships.

Barb (Becky Armor) and Bob (Lou DeLucia) are a longtime married couple who no longer communicate and are drifting apart. Their problems are exacerbated by Barb's newfound interest in Buddhism, which requires that she divest herself of material things or, in other words, get rid of "stuff."

Carla Carla (Norma Calderon) and Donna (Heather Huber-Brown) are a lesbian couple in a committed relationship. They're contemplating marriage, or the equivalent, and the main thing standing in their way is Donna's addiction to tobacco.

Nick (Christopher Sugarman) is desperately seeking a way out of a life of one-night stands. He is looking for a lasting relationship with a man and ends up falling in love with a shark (Zack Krone).

The lives of these people intertwine, as Barb advises her friend Carla Carla, and Nick and his friend Donna exchange confidences. Bob is sort of odd-man out and doesn't really connect with anyone. The Shark, well he's a shark who likes to swim in the shallows, and we all know why sharks like to do that.

Under the direction of Susan Myer, this is a tightly knit production, and the action zips along with never a drop in the energy level. The blocking is interesting and takes advantage of the figure-eight motions typical of an attacking mako shark.

As usual, Myer has brought together a great acting and production ensemble. Teamwork is one of the keys to success, and Myer is an expert team builder.

Django Hulphers' deceptively simple set design, with the backdrop of large aquarium tanks, is extremely effective, as is his lighting design and Randy Birch's sound design. Pay attention to the costumes (Sugarman and Tiffany White); the costume changes are significant.

Armor brings a cheeky insouciance to the role of Barb and is very watchable. Her body language is subtle, and she achieves a great deal with the smallest of gestures.

We have to feel sorry for her husband Bob, and DeLucia gives pathos to this man who has an outfit for every occasion. To continue the swimming image, he is clearly out of his depth, and it's not for nothing that he throws his possessions into the swimming pool.

Sugarman does his usual excellent job as Nick, which is a sweetly goofy role and well within Sugarman's range. However, Sugarman is a very talented actor, and it would be nice to see him extend his scope and take on a more challenging role.

Krone's performance as The Shark is nicely nuanced. He is charming and attractive but at the same time detached. His agitated movements in the aquarium tank mimic the behavior of the ocean's super predator. Krone introduces a subtle element of menace and draws out the symbolism of his role.

Calderon is strong and convincing as Carla Carla. She takes the upper hand with her partner but conveys more vulnerability when she interacts with Barb.

Huber-Brown's Donna has some excellent comic scenes, especially where she describes her efforts to quit smoking. She brings a waif-like quality to her role, which contrasts nicely with Calderon's take-charge

personality. In her interactions with Sugarman, she takes on a more forceful persona.

As the two women prepare for their wedding, the gay-marriage furor currently going on in San Francisco and nationwide has to remind us of the topicality of this play.

Adam Bock is not one of my favorite playwrights. However, his writing is crisp and comedic. On the serious side, as he examines different types of relationships, he makes it clear that all relationships, be they homosexual, heterosexual or man-shark, have similar problems.

In the end, it's our own humanity that makes us who we are and determines whether we succeed or fail.

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"Swimming with Sharks" runs at Actors' Theatre, 1001 Center St., Santa Cruz, through March 20 with performances Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m. and two Sundays (March 7 and 14) at 3 p.m. Tickets are available at the Civic Center Box Office, 420-5260. This production is well worth a visit.

Bratton Online – February 27, 2004



Awards & Reviews

Winner of three 1999 Bay Area Critics Circle Awards, including Best Original Script

"Imagine falling for a shark. And - if you can grapple with that - imagine getting it on. In Adam Bock's snappy script the potential fatal attraction is not only a surreal twist, but a fitting comic metaphor in a play about relationship start-ups and breakdowns." - *TimeOut London*

"Quirky, surprising, and extremely funny, *Shallows* rushes its characters headlong into the heart of their obsessions, staying true to its own wild logic along the way." - *San Francisco Bay Guardian*

"taut dialogue and carefully observed characters . . . clever stuff" - *Ham & High*

"Essentially a new slant on an age-old theme, relationships, three couples struggle to hang on to (or to find) love. What is engaging about 'Swimming in the Shallows' is the charisma of the characters and especially the warmth and humour of the script. The dialogue is pacey and the story is surprisingly and sometimes brilliantly surreal. The end result is a play that is original,

inventive and entertaining." - *ThreeWeeks*