

*Unrequited Love* is billed as a series of eight vignettes that ask the question, "If love is a battlefield, then who's winning the war?" The play is a look at the sexual politics and consequences of romantic love, and for the most part succeeds. It starts off with a comedic bang, but later segments veer off into satire, with more than a few flat-out serious and disturbing moments that clash awkwardly with the witty comedy that preceded them. Some of the darker scenes are compelling, but others are not nearly as effective and feel disjointed and unfinished. Ultimately, the comedic storylines that begin the evening are more successful than the satirical ones.

"Nothing Personal" and "Misery Loves Company" are sharply written and boisterously entertaining. "Nothing Personal" appears to be a job interview and contract negotiation. What the participants are looking to acquire, however, is not a business partnership, but a romantic attachment. Tiffany Adams and Erik LaRay Harvey are sly, ultra-sophisticated, jaded, and very, very funny here. Their witty banter and sparkling chemistry—reminiscent of the Hepburn/Tracy battle-of-the-sexes films—really carries the narrative. "Misery Loves Company" is ostensibly about two construction workers hanging out together on their lunch break. Their outlook on relationships with the opposite sex becomes apparent in their conversation and behavior. One attempts to hide his contempt for women with crude come-ons to the pedestrians who walk by, but when they ignore him, his leering compliments turn into coarse insults. His romantic coworker is considering proposing to his girlfriend, but is reluctantly swayed by his companion's misogynistic view of women. It is ultimately a quietly sad tale that unfolds within the humor.

Other pieces in the program offer a more serious, if satirical, look at present-day African American culture. One strong segment, "All Gods Chil'un" is a look at what can happen when young children have babies before they are old enough to care for them. Here, a 13-year-old on the phone with her friend loses her temper and takes it out on her child. His cries for food and attention interfere with her desire to dish about a boy she likes. It is unclear if the tale is supposed to be a comical cautionary tale; certainly, the abrupt change from light humor to the ultra-seriousness of the story is jarring and more than a little disturbing.

Another monologue shows the audience a man in army fatigues, dodging real and metaphorical bullets. According to the soldier, women are now the enemy, and they are the reason that men like Jesse Jackson, Mike Tyson and Marion Barry have fallen from grace. He's bewildered and suspicious because, "...How do you play the game if the rules keep changing?" The penultimate scene is a game show gone wrong, satirizing African American culture with questions about love songs as an endangered music form, and why drive-by shootings have taken the place of stickball games.

Framing the play's scenes is an ongoing game of phone tag between two people who met at a party and are attempting to make a date. When they finally do meet at the end of *Unrequited Love*, they discover that they have absolutely nothing in common. The actors are hilarious in their comic dismay. Yet once they get past their disappointment, they hit it off anyway, so the show leaves the audience with an uneasy but hopeful feeling that maybe love can occasionally save the day. It's a good way to end an evening that asks a lot of questions about the way men and women treat one another.

Directed and written by Melissa Maxwell, *Unrequited Love's* staging, sound and lighting are simple and effective. The cast is quite adept in the comedy department, and there are some exceptional performances by Tiffany Adams, Erik LaRay Harvey and Devin Haqq. The majority of the scenes are all well written, but the evening's twin threads of romantic comedy and biting satire hang together uncomfortably, like two pieces of clothing that don't know if they're for climbing the corporate ladder or hanging out at a bar. Gender politics seems more than trivial when compared to child abuse; some of the pieces just feel too pointed and unsettling to share the bill with light, frothy and comedic stories about love.

But it is, nevertheless, an enjoyable evening. If a lively debate on the changing world of relationships between men and women is what you're looking for, check out *Unrequited Love* at The New Perspectives Theatre Company. As for who's winning this war... well, the playwright wisely leaves the answer up to the audience. Let the battle continue.