

ALONE AT THE BEACH

AT BAY STREET

By Mark Hall Amitin

To kick off their second year, Bay Street Theater Festival has chosen Richard Dresser's parfait comedy, seemingly custom designed for a Hamptons audience. *Alone at the Beach* examines the intersecting lives of six young strangers as they find themselves in a summer share in the Hamptons.

What starts out as a nightmare for everyone involved (a study in heterology of unlikely and mismatched personalities — a sort of *You can't Take It With You* of the summer set, if you will) becomes a journey to self-discovery and the erosion of public persona to reveal a deeper meaning in the lives of these desperate souls. It's light fare with psycho-seasoning. There's enough convenient plot twists, kinky sexual innuendo, and topical humor to keep all three acts buoyantly afloat in a sea of laughter.

Director Susan Brinkley has assembled a deft and delightful cast of actors, many of whom you'll have seen on both TV and in films, to carry it all off. The plot centers on George, portrayed with nerdish abandon by Judge Reinhold, who perfected this character in the hilarious *Ruthless People*. He has inherited his grandmother's

house, and, in order to afford the maintenance, he has to rent out five rooms for the season. The play opens with him indecisively preparing for the arrival of his boarders. He can hardly come to grips with whether to leave his tie and jacket on or off. The first of the sextet is a blustery feminist lawyer, Chris, played to edgy perfection by Allison Janney. The traffic was unbearable and so is her headache, not to mention her allergies.

George has clearly specified no pets, smoking or drugs, but this parade of misfits hardly cleaves to his rules. Stud-boy Robbie's response to George is an astonishing, "you want to let your life slip away without drugs?" No one can agree on rooms, food or activities despite George's do good "one for all" hopes.

By Fourth of July, George has fallen head over heels for sweet but psychotic Molly. Mia Dillon's creation of internal combustion and sweetness combines to make an enigmatic creature whom we come to both pity and adore. At the first breakfast she sums it all up with a simple, "Decaf? What's the point?". Lonnie (Julie Boyd) desperately and constantly tries to seduce the randy and brainless, but hunky Bobbie, played with joyful abandon by Nick

Gregory, who seems to have a serious problem keeping his clothes on throughout the play. The costume designer, Michael Krass, should be credited for a witty selection of briefs.

There are enough twists and turns of plot to keep laughs going and just enough character development for these wonderful actors to make something of this concoction. When we come to the final Labor Day weekend, those unlikely friendships have bonded, several liaisons have ensued, and we have discovered that what we see is not always what we get after all.

Special credit must be given to Executive Producer, actor Stephen Hamilton who stepped in just before showtime to take the role of Alex, normally played by Michael Mantell who got stuck in the city shooting Robert Redford's new film *Quiz Show*. Had we not been informed of the switch, one would have been quite content, as Mr. Hamilton is solid and funny as the computer wank who moves us to near tears at the end.

My advice is to check out the entire Bay Street season which includes the revival of last season's *Men's Lives* and the premiere of the new Paula Vogel play, *Desdemona*. Call the box office for schedule and tickets at 725-1108. ▲



Photo: Gary Mamay
Michael Manfell, Judge Reinhold, Nick Gregory, Allison Janney, Julie Boyd, Mia Dillon