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'Tiger,' 'Zoo Story' Share Double Bill

By LEAH D. FRANK

THE Arena Players Repertory Company recently opened the Second Stage, a small theater next door to its primary space. It is here that the company presents either developmental work or work that, for a variety of reasons, might not be done in the main arena. And it is to the Second Stage that popular shows from the larger stage are moved to provide space for a longer run.

The Arena Players are presenting, through July 22, two one-act plays at Second Stage, Murray Schisgal's "The Tiger" and Edward Albee's "The Zoo Story." The one-act play

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can be a small gem of theater art, and many of America's finest playwrights, among them Eugene O'Neill, Edward Albee and Tennessee Williams, became known because of their early experiments in this mode of dramatic expression. The genre has fallen out of favor over the years, and it is only in such places as Arena where we're treated to an evening of one-act plays.

"The Tiger" and "The Zoo Story" are thematically linked. In both works the protagonist is searching for the answer to the question "Who am I?" In each play the main character feels impotent in what is perceived to be an indifferent, uncaring world. And both plays revolve around an act of violence.

In "The Tiger," which is the least successful of the two in both script and in execution, a mailman has kidnapped a young housewife and mother and is threatening to kill her. He forces her to disrobe and hints at adding sexual brutality to the crime of abduction. Unfortunately, this play is supposed to be a comedy, and Mr. Schisgal has tried to lighten his story by turning the woman into a dizzy blonde who gets turned on by the insane mailman. This idea of a woman responding positively to physical violence is the stuff out of which pornographic movies are created.

She sympathizes with the lunatic ravings of the kidnapper, she tries to teach him French, she becomes seductive and willingly and adoringly makes love to him. When he lets her go, she asks to see him again and promises that next time she will also clean up his filthy apartment. It's a particularly demeaning portrait of women.

The mailman suffers from a severe identity problem. He is self-educated, extremely bright, and he believes himself to be trapped in a world populated by dreary, dull people he considers to be insensitive and one-dimen-

sional at best. It galls him to have to deliver their mail. He has twisted his dissatisfaction with the world into misogyny, which leads him to the kidnapping.

Lane Luckert plays Ben, the mailman, with a high-pitched intensity that becomes tiresome in a very short time. If he has spent time analyzing his character, it is not apparent in his rushed performance. Linda Bub is Gloria, the victimized housewife. Miss Bub displays a bent for comedy with her affected New York accent and her wide-eyed, goofy responses to her bizarre situation. One of the best scenes in the play is when she attempts to teach Ben unintentionally totally mispronounced French.

"The Zoo Story," which follows "The Tiger" on this twin bill, has not lost any of its dramatic power in the 24 years since its premiere. It tells the story of Jerry, a man who has consistently lost every battle large and small in life. The play is filled with Jerry's unanswerable questions: Who are we? Who am I? What does it all mean? Are we animal or vegetable, and what is an animal anyway?

Jerry walks into Central Park and intrudes on Peter, a man who is sitting on a park bench peacefully reading a book, calmly going through life. Their contact is so forceful that the play's ending remains a shocker regardless of how familiar "The Zoo Story" has become.

Lane Luckert is more successful as the subdued Peter than he was as the insane mailman in "The Tiger," although here, too, he occasionally rushes through his dialogue. Jerry is played by John Monteleone, an actor who is more than capable of handling Mr. Albee's complex character. Although he occasionally lapses into rote line reading, when he is on target his performance is a mixture of wild-eyed fear and soaring strength.

The director, Frederic De Feis, has not explored the various levels inherent in either play, especially in "The Zoo Story." The things that are wrong with the evening, such as the rushed performances and the uneven pacing, are primarily directorial flaws. However, "The Zoo Story" is an exceptional work of art. It is receiving a solid production at the Second Stage, and it's worth the effort to get to the Arena Players Repertory Company to see it.

