

PLEASE GIVE TO MONICA - THANKS

SHAWN ON STANTON

BY

TOM MURRIN

Five fiery theater works, presented by the newly configured "Clubbed Thumb", will ignite the flames of drama at House of Candles this month. The featured production is Wallace Shawn's "Marie and Bruce", a play about "one hot summer day in the life of a New York couple who are having extreme problems, and whose particular ways of dealing with each other have come to a head." Sounds like the very thing for a night in July.

Shawn, a talented and renowned playwright (his latest play, "Designated Mourner", is the current big hit in London; "Aunt Dan and Lemon" was his most popular off-Broadway show till now), as well as film actor ("My Dinner with Andre", among others), has successfully stepped out of the shadow of his father, a legendary editor of the New Yorker, and carved his own niche as a writer for the stage, making plays that are satirically funny, populated with "terrified, liberal humanists", and always have a point! The latter earmark alone is refreshing.

Speaking with director Maria Striar, at the aqua re-painted "Pink Pony" (please, the counterman is tired of jokes about the "Blue Pony"), I was happily surprised to learn that there is a cast of 14, in a play that's basically about one couple. Striar explained, "This is the day Marie plans to leave Bruce. They go to a party that night, where all these 'really great people' attend, and Bruce, bolstered by the crowd of swells and 'really great drinks' becomes viciously funny, but it's not funny to Marie. Then they go to a restaurant, where Marie lets it all out." Personally, I like plays with large casts - more people to look at - and it seems as if the party and restaurant scenes will be heavily populated. Striar adds the 2 main selling points of the 70-minute one-act, and they are hard to top, "It's funny, and it's short."

Striar knows her playwright though, "I think his intent is very much to bring up uncomfortable check-points, especially for upper middle-class liberals; like where we are, and the state of our relation

to civilization at a given point of time." Adding, "His plays are hilarious, but it's self-incriminating humor. Both of the author and of those whom you can generally expect to be his audience, ie. educated liberals who go to theater." And, "Because of the nature of his comedy, he's ultimately in the Moliere vein, ie. there's a moral end to the laughter. It's not just escapism or froth." Alright, less froth.

Striar, a straightforward and charming woman in her late '20s, with long, curly red hair and brown eyes, is also an actor. (She majored in theater at Brown, and did grad work at University of California at San Diego). In NYC for only a year, she's done a number of plays at NADA, notably Erin Courtney's "Mother's Couch", in the fall of '95, where she played "Argentina", a high-energy, psychologically-dysfunctional, gun-toting thief, who wore a teddy bear back pack.

In addition to directing "Marie and Bruce", she has helped organize the festival of 5 plays. (She and her friends rented House of Candles for the month of July). And although "Putting on a play that is a part of a festival is a logistics nightmare", she says, "On the whole, I've found the downtown theater scene is really generous and supportive. People work very hard, and they're very respectful of each other, and their time and commitment."

"Marie and Bruce", at House of Candles, 99 Stanton St., Res. 539-3979, July 18-28, Thurs.-Sun., at 8 P.M., \$10. (For information about the other shows in the festival, please call 802-8007.)