Prickly Delights
Playwright Erin Courtney's violent nights.
BY TOM MURRIN

Playwright Erin Courtney says she chose Pricked as the title of her latest theater piece "because it has both a sexual and an irritably violent feel." The work's past tense is a good choice for this testy, nasty, conflict-filled one-act wherein a broke young couple, who are at the end of their destructive relationship, move in with the woman's parents. "All the characters are like black holes," Courtney explains, "and the only way they can relate to each other is through physical sensation: sex, violence or goading each other into self-mutilation."

The talented 29-year-old, who has six short plays to her credit, says, "The writing always begins with a single image." For Pricked, she reveals, "It was an image from my pre-natal existence—a woman with mummy hands." Generous with her ice-melting smile, Courtney cheerfully relates, "My mom was nine months pregnant with me, and even though she had three other children, she decided she had to do a crafts project. While stitching a giant felt 'Welcome Home, Baby' banner, she pricked all of her fingers with the needle, and the dye from the cloth seeped in and gave her blood poisoning. At the hospital they lanced her fingers and bandaged up her hands, so they looked like big mummy hands. She had to drive herself home with these terrible tonglike, cloth-covered hands on the wheel." So needless, blood poisoning and bandaged hands are in the Pricked script, along with uninitiated Coke bottles and smoldering cigarette burns.

Pricked is Courtney's first attempt at naturalism; her background is absurdism. While at Brown University in 1988, she wrote her first play, Telephone or Bite Me, in which a main character is a 10-foot papier-mâché phone. While getting her master's in fine arts at the San Francisco Art Institute in the early '90s, she wrote Carcass Dreams, about a female taxidermist who reluctantly gives birth to a daughter, whom she eventually stuffs. Trained as an artist, Courtney has been riding two creative ponies since she moved here in '94. As part of the "Artists in the Marketplace" exhibition at the Bronx Museum this month, every Sunday she will take Polaroids of visitors and make charcoal drawings of them on the wall.

As a writer, Courtney feels accountable to her audience. "For the playwright, actors and director, our job is to make the experience as visceral, funny and engaging as possible," she says. "If people are coming out of their house, going across town and paying money to see your play, then you want it to be an exciting experience for them."

Pricked is at HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., 647-0202. July 17−19, Thurs.−Sat., 10:30 p.m. $8. *

Theater Trips
BY RICKY SPEARS

GROSS INDECENCY—THE THREE TRIALS OF OSCAR WILDE

Daring actual trial testimony, literature and diaries, Gross Indecency presents a riveting evening of high courtroom drama as Wilde attempts to keep his ass out of prison while keeping his stylish opinions intact. Director/writer Moïse Kaufman has fashioned a chic play that will kick the argyle socks right off your feet. The superb cast, headed by the triumphant Michael Emerson as Wilde, makes for one of the handsomest shows I've ever seen. Theater is definitely alive and well downtown. Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, 420-8000. Tues.−Fri., 6 p.m.; Sat., 7 & 10 p.m.; Sun., 3 & 7 p.m. $20−$45.

LONDON ASSURANCE

Was it about our overseas cousins that is so amusing? Could it be that they are so damn that we have to laugh hysterically at their every move? That's the case in this splendid production of Dion Boucicault's 1841 play, Brian Bedford (The Molière Comedies) proves once again that he is one of the motherland's greatest actors. As the foppish Sir Harcourt Courtry, he's pure gold. A weekend with this tart and his oh-so-proper friends will leave you in stitches. Helen Carey also deserves many accolades as Lady Gay Spanker. A brilliant piece of theater. Roundabout Stage Right, 1530 Broadway, 959-8400. Tues−Sat., 8 p.m.; Wed., Sat. & Sun., 2 p.m. $55.

THE YOUNG MAN FROM ATLANTA

his tight play about a young man's suicide and his "roommate," who comes to make a kind of peace with his family, is at times harrowing and unforgettable. Though the "G" word is never mentioned, there's enough subtext in this short work to fill volumes. In the hands of the gifted actors Shirley Knight and Rip Tom as the dead man's parents, Horton Foote's story of parental dread, loss and longing enlightens the soul. This is high-quality, Pulitzer-winning stuff and shouldn't be missed. Longacre Theatre, 220 W. 48th St., 239-6200. Tues−Sat., 8 p.m.; Wed−Sat., 2 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m. $45. *
OVER A GIANT VEGETARIAN burrito at a Soho restaurant, the bespectacled, soft-spoken playwright Mac Wellman recounts a recent rehearsal for one of his plays that was being staged at NADA. The playwright had shown up to offer support and, if asked, advice. When he asked the cast if there were any questions, one worried-looking actress timidly put up her hand. "I have a line that says, 'I'm of two minds,'" she said.

"Yes?" replied Wellman.

"Well," she said, "I was just wondering. Does that mean I'm not sure about something, or do I actually have two brains?"

"You're on the fence," the playwright assured her.

"The thing is," Wellman said as he munched on his lunch, "it was a legitimate question."
Character Contrast

When the character recollects his or her experiences of being in love, the contrast between the past and present becomes apparent. The character feels a sense of nostalgia for the past, which is contrasted with the present, where the character is stuck in a rut. This contrast creates a sense of longing and regret, which is reflected in the character's actions and dialogue.

John Williams in Terminal Hip

Hit the ground running, the character says. Hit the ground running, the character says. Hit the ground running, the character says.

By Marco Robinson

terminal hip

The Self-Education

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1998 production of

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