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Arts & Entertainment:

Central Works Stages 'The Window Age'

By Ken Bullock Special to the Planet
Wednesday February 25, 2009

"I respect your privacy—but I would really like to get inside that head of yours." The triangulation of the endless ways of seeing another—or ourselves through the eyes of another, who is seen by yet another still—are visited and revisited by the interlocked trio of characters in Christopher Chen's *The Window Age*, staged by Central Works at the Berkeley City Club, a triumph of their particular style of collaboration between author, actors, director and designers developing a show.

The Window Age details the start of an evening visit by Simon Floyd (Richard Frederick) to his old Cambridge chum Jeremy Fox (Joel Mullennix), a veteran of the trenches of the First World War, and his novelist wife Valerie (Jan Zvaifler), who suffers from "episodes." Simon and Valerie, clearly modeled on Freud and Virginia Woolf, admire each other as pioneers in the exploration of the subconscious and in the immediacy of consciousness.

There are hints at romantic attachment—declarations even—but the shadowy new realm both are exploring makes even these adepts unreliable witnesses to the truth. Going back over the evening's events to add in subtext between the original lines of dialogue, the play catches up the contradictions of human relationships in a particularly witty, theatrical style, outmaneuvering—or incorporating—its own melancholy.

"This body could be a hotel for drifting souls." Each of the three enacts, or reenacts, their own "Vision," not a soliloquy (there are soliloquies), but interacting with the others, or their projection of the others. Valerie lives out her anxieties and discovery of parallel perspectives and voices, Jeremy his ghastly memories of warfare, and Simon finds himself subject to the emotional and mental complexes he's hypothesized and named, in a dreamlike proceeding.

At moments, it's like some grand pyramid scheme of the emotions—and this is part of its humor, that very grandiousness of modernistic selfconsciousness, set off against the visionary anxiety that comes out of, and seeks to overcome, personal isolation.

Gary Graves' direction and ever-changing lighting, and Gregory Scharpen's engaging yet oblique sound design add to and help articulate the complexities arising from the playfulness—a serious playfulness—of the story as it's told by the actors, each alone or in combinations, duo and trio.

Much of the resourcefulness, on every level, seems to reflect particular advances the company has made in one production or another over the past few years, here adding up to be a mobile image, both ambiguously allusive and complete in itself. Similarly, some of the most banal remarks are refracted by the subtly mounting tension, becoming the most leading of statements.

"I never die in my dreams; it's a thing of mine." *The Window Age* brings up questions of mortality, isolation, intimacy and the attempt to represent, understand, come to grips with it all—and the tangled identity of individuals with their own ways of dealing with it, their own reckoning. The answers its characters seek never emerge, but the way in which their searching and even their misunderstandings mesh together becomes a dance—of life, of death.

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