

*Steaming* by Nell Dunn

Hutt Repertory Theatre, 108 Oxford Terrace, Lower Hutt, until 19 December

Reviewed by Ewen Coleman on 17 December 2009

When first produced in London in 1981 *Steaming* was labeled as an unashamedly raunchy comedy. Some thirty years on it may not appear as raunchy as when first produced, the comedy may seem tired in places and not raising the laugh's it once did and the feminist philosophies the play espouses may not be as relevant now as then but for all this the play is nevertheless an entertaining piece of theatre which Hutt Repertory Theatre do well to bring to life.

The setting is a Turkish bathhouse which has been the domain of Violet and her girls for over 18 years; not only as a place to come for a relaxing steam and spa but also a refuge from the ravages of social problems, men and unheated housing estates where the women can let off steam unabated about these and many other issues. The six women, each from different backgrounds and with different personalities, talk about their lives, loves, losses, hopes and desires. But when, without warning, the local council threatens to close the bathhouse the women get really steamed up and are galvanised into action as a group to save the bathhouse.

There is lots of talking and little action apart from the women going in and out of the changing room and steam room, the women wearing bathing suits under their towels rather than nothing as intended by the playwright – completely shedding their clothes is their way of shedding their inhibitions and the cares of the world so still being partially dressed somehow seemed to sublimate this concept – but they do well to flesh out the rather stereotypical characters and develop inter-personnel relationships between the women. And while the tempo picks up through the second half when they have a cause to rally against, it is a little too even through the first half, with much of the dramatic tension inherent in the text missing. Mention must also be made of the excellent set, giving the feel and ambience of a genuine bathhouse, though actual steam wafting into the main room every time the steam room door was opened would have added even more authenticity to the set. For all that though this was a well put-together production that while appearing somewhat dated nevertheless was amusing and entertaining.