

Necessary Targets by Eve Ensler, directed by Claire Hewitt
Stagecraft Theatre, Gryphon Theatre, 22 Ghuznee Street till 4 April
Reviewed by Ewen Coleman 25 March 2009

War always appears to be the prerogative of men, and while it is true that they can sustain the greatest number of casualties in a war zone, women are often no lesser casualties, especially in conflict areas like Bosnia. And it is the women of this region that playwright Eve Ensler visited, meet and interviewed for her play *Necessary Targets*. Best known for her play *The Vagina Monologues*, Ensler continues her quest to not only write about women but to write plays for women, one of the redeeming features of *Necessary Targets* being the fact that it is a play with 7 great parts for women.

The play involves the unlikely situation of two American women, supposedly specialists in mental health, visiting a refugee camp for women in Bosnia to assist the women there to come to terms with the mental trauma of being dispossessed from their homes and villages by the war. J.S (Loren Martin) is a middle aged psychiatrist who leaves the shelter of her New York practice for this mission while her assistant is Melissa (Tanya Piejus), a young, exuberant, headstrong trauma therapist in the process of writing a book about the plight of women in war torn regions of the world. The women refugees they meet are a group of mixed ethnicity, though presumably Muslim. There is Zlata (Dee Guja), a reserved recluse who used to be a paediatrician, Jelena (Kate Blackhurst) who loves a good night out even though she gets beaten up by her husband for her efforts, the old peasant Azra (Christine Hunt) who clings to the memory of her old cow Blossom although the cow has long since died, Nuna (Emmy Wafer) a young articulate teenager and Seada (Eva Corlett) a young mother clinging to not only the memory but what she thinks is her actual baby.

During the course of the play, in the process of trying to get the refugee women to open up, we learn the plight, albeit sketchily, of each at the same time watching the psychiatrist J.S. rediscover parts of herself while Melissa, who is revealed as an exploitative war junkie learns nothing about either the women or herself. By play's end though nothing much changes, the psychiatrist goes back to her New York city life, somewhat changed, while life for the refugee women goes on much as it did before and we are left to wonder what is the answer, if in fact there is one, in these situations.

That Ensler has brought this to our attention is commendable but even though the actors playing the refugee women in this production, under Claire Hewitt's direction, all without exception, give great performances, bringing humanity, understanding and a depth of feeling to their characters, the formulaic structure of the play never allows the actors and consequently us the audience to get to know them as real people, the play being more story telling than character developing. As the two intruders Martin and Peijus give commendable performances, the role of the psychiatrist obviously out of place to start with but in the end it is her experience and humanity that wins out while the trauma therapist storms off revealing her exact intentions, even though most of her dialogue sounds like it has come straight from a Psychology 101 paper.

While the production overall is rather even, and the dramatic moments need to build more to give the production the required light and shade it needs, which no doubt will develop as the season progresses, it works exceptionally well on the creative and cleverly designed set, the numerous scenes flowing from one to the other effortlessly to make this, while the play's content is not wholly satisfying, the production itself very watchable.