

# Nightlife

October 17, 1998

## refugees return home

Theatre-goers who missed STEPHANIE SATIE'S "REFUGEES," are in for an exciting treat! Due to popular demand the show re-opens October 2, at The Bitter Truth Theatre, 11050 Magnolia Blvd. (between Lankershim and Vineland) in the NOHO Arts District. Friday 8 pm and Sunday 2 pm for five weeks (closing Nov1). Reservations strongly advised. Call 818/766-0211. Following, T.S. Kerrigan's original review for Nightlife:

Stephanie Satie's multiple-character one person show is a provocative examination of who we are based on our particular ethnic heritage and background. The play, which is based both on the author's experiences as a teacher of English as a second language and on her own sometimes painful search for her cultural identity, definitely has it moments.

Satie, a veteran actress who clearly knows how to command a stage, gives a compelling performance as herself and as a myriad of characters, including Armenians, Russians (of both sexes), Iranians, and Jews. There is the passive Jilla, who is subjected to physical abuse by her unenlightened husband; the embittered Farideh, who has suffered personally from the incredible political chaos of her homeland; the bullish Boris, who attempts to intimidate the rest of the class; the optimistic Ninel (Lenin spelled backwards), who lives by scrubbing floors at the local McDonald's; the opportunistic Marissa, who marries solely for advantage; and the others, all who have come to America seeking the promise of a richer and better life. Like the generations before them, they must experience all the hardships of life in a new country where the majority of people are different than they. One walks out of the theater with the sense that Satie has rendered them all with confidence and precision, and with careful attention to the various dialects, giving us clear insights into the personal struggles of each of these people.

Satie's personal struggle with her heritage is woven seamlessly into the stories of the students. She tells us how, after many years, she has come to grips with the negativity of her ancestors and their neurotic rejection of their Jewishness by affirming this legacy in her own consciousness. It is an uplifting account of a woman's search for her identity.

The play, which runs about 15 minutes too long, might have been even more resonant if Satie had trusted her audience to draw its own conclusions about the significance of what they have heard about these particular people's lives by the end of the evening. But at a VE Day celebration in class near the conclusion of the course, a party complete with vodka toasts and good fellowship, Satie cannot help taking the opportunity of playing teacher, giving us a lesson about society in general, and in the process, making overly familiar, sometimes platitudinous, deductions about the immigrant experience and the American dream. This is superfluous and takes away

*Continued on page 27*

from the intensity of the play as a whole, the strength of which lies in the showing, not the telling.

These few flaws aside, Refugees is a satisfying look at people too often neglected in the theater, portrayed by an actor who has an abundance of charisma. Under Anita Khandazian's careful direction, Satie has us in the palm of her hand from the beginning until the lights come up at the end. May her tribe increase.

**-T.S.Kerrigan**