



Providence, R.I. June 8, 2003

Theater

Weaver's Menopause Mama can dance

05/30/2003

BY CHANNING GRAY

Journal Arts Writer

Rose Weaver, beloved in these parts as a singer and actress, has ventured into the ever-expanding universe of the self-confessional monologue and come up . . . well, smelling like roses.

Weaver, a familiar face at Trinity Rep for many a season, has brought to the Perishable Theatre stage a revamped version of the collection of vignettes dealing with menopause that first appeared in workshops last fall. Unveiled at Wednesday's press night, the ready-for-the-road version of Menopause Mama proved slick, tight, the perfect vehicle for Weaver to showcase her talents as singer, actress, and now, writer.

It is, however, a night of theater aimed at a specific crowd, even though Weaver has tried to make her tales of women battling the midlife blues appealing to as large an audience as possible. She does after all, include among the host of characters she has conjured from her imagination a stud who, feeling he's headed out to pasture, hits up his doc for the "blue pill." This, I gather, is supposed to woo the male demographic, although I'm not so sure there are a lot of fifty-something guys out there who want to be reminded that not everything works as well as it once did. But as the main course for a gal's night out, Menopause Mama could have legs. It's not as intense and cutting as Eve Ensler's smash Vagina Monologues, an early model for Weaver. But this warmer, fuzzier spinoff could well develop the same sort of cult following as Ensler's clever exploration of female sexuality.

Weaver is certainly hoping to tour it. And Lord knows, there are a lot of women out there who can identify with the kind of middle-age travails included in this 90-minute one-woman show.

With the aid of the barest of props -- a few funky hats, a walking stick, a couple of exercise dumb bells -- Weaver assumes a wide, colorful array of characters who tell it like it is. "If you want love now baby and you don't know what to do," sings Weaver in the guise of a wise, and feisty old sister, "try an older woman and she'll make a man out of you."

But we also get to hear about "the change" from the perspective of a pig-tailed 13-year-old, who seems to not have a clue about the facts of life -- until she spits out a string of euphemisms for the curse, the beast, no, make that "when the cardinal comes to town." Weaver attempts to provide a pan-cultural take on menstruation and menopause. She has that sagacious-old-prophetess-with-the-cane talk about societies that isolated women in tents and huts during their period.

Thankfully, the academic side of this subject is kept to a minimum. For it's more the raw, confessional moments that grab us, like the lamentations of a Jamaican woman who tells her therapist how much she misses making love to her husband, how she cries while reading the morning paper, and just feels so sad.

Menopause Mama is no downer, though. It's got some funny lines, and in the end it is a celebration of the natural and unstoppable process of aging.

"This woman's not done," sings an ebullient Weaver in the final moments of the show. Although Weaver seems to be devoting more of her energies to writing these days, she has not lost her touch as an actress, or chanteuse. She's great in the bluesy song Blue Pill, even though it's scored down low to sound like a the confessions of a fading hunk. "I feel like I wanna" growls Weaver in a guttural alto, "but I can't when I oughta." There's a sweet skit, too, in which our star ever so timidly strikes up an Internet romance with a retired bus driver, who's too old, so she thinks, and lives too far away. That's the play's longest segment, requiring subtleties and inflections not found in some of the more broadly painted portrayals. It was right after this budding Internet romance that the show seemed to have trouble regaining its momentum, perhaps because the scene is so weighty.

Anyway, many voices are heard during this tour de force, and they all ring true. That, I suspect, is because they all come out of the 54-year-old Weaver's own decade-long journey through menopause.

It has been, to gauge from her script, something of a roller coaster ride, a time of uncertainty, but ultimately, as her alter egos on the Perishable stage proclaim, one of growth, strength and wisdom.

This is not a play about messages, however. It does not stretch so far as to embrace the human condition. It does not stop the world in its tracks and ask where we're all headed. No, it sticks very much to a topic that to some might seem a little off-putting, even with Weaver's efforts to remove the stigma of menopause. But it also manages to deal with this touchy topic in a amusing, touching and entertaining fashion. Rose Weaver's Menopause Mama runs through June 29 at Perishable Theatre, 95 Empire St. Tickets are \$25, and two for \$25 on Wednesdays. Call 331-2695.