

# Summer Days about alley cats, invisible lovers

By ZELDA HELLER

Two of the most engaging tom cats I've ever met are now visible on stage at the Centaur Theatre.

Neither the fact that the two cats in question happen to have only two legs each, nor that they wear business suits, ties and white shoes and white gloves, nor the fact that they speak in a language at least momentarily comprehensible by humans, takes anything away from their catiness.

Even knowing that they are otherwise known (when off stage) as actors Peter Elliot and Alan Scarfe, doesn't make them any the less alley-cat-like.

To watch them menacingly and motionlessly eye a bird or a star, to watch them slip out from under a human caress, or spy on each other while eating — is to enjoy all the pleasures of cat-owning. To watch them gloatingly imagine the devouring of a sleeping human, rousing themselves to a frenzied orgy of bloodlust, is to have confirmed any fundamental feline mistrust you might have harbored.

The conversations that contemporary French playwright Romain Weingarten has given them (as translated by Suzanne Grossmann) in *Summer Days*, the play about lost innocence of which they are a part, are not delicate, pretty pussy talk, or kittenish either.

These are big solid males, greedy, bad-tempered, philosphizing, fighting — and they talk accordingly.

"If you want to ask questions, answer them yourself," cries one. "It is for that which was never seen that the eye stays open," the other explains later.

"When one doesn't see people for a long time, it means they are dead."

Or, later this exchange: "Holy mackerel!" "What sort of expression is that?" "Christian."

In addition to the two cats, the play contains a garden, a great tree (both superbly conceived and executed by designer Germain), a pair of invisible lovers, an even more invisible mother, and an adolescent, innocent sister and brother — the latter slightly simple-minded, or is it just immature?

The children seem to live alone in the house fronting on the garden, though mother's orders are often in their speech. They chatter, talk and quarrel with the cats, worship the young lovers and try to imitate them and finally begin to grow up.

But, as much as you find yourself believing every moment of the cats' lives, (even one of the cat's infatuation with a verse-writing fly), it seems very difficult to make yourself believe in the children's lives.

At first encounter the fault seems to be the playwright's. Though the children's lines seemed to live occasionally, for the most part their dialogue seemed to me artificially constructed and invented; and loaded down with all kinds of messages and implications. The need to add Great Significance to their roles seems to crush out almost every spark of life in them.

On the other hand the problem may be only partly the author's. For the actors playing the two young people seemed, at least last night, to be at once too old in years and too young in experience to be able to bring off the necessary mood of crystalline candor, without which their roles lose their reason for being.

All in all director Maurice Podbrey seems to find himself with half a show that's a fine success on the cat side and half a show that is rather the opposite on the human side.

A humiliating situation for us people: and let's hope not a prophetic one.

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