

Bay Windows

Mar. 7 - Mar. 13, 2002

New England's Largest Gay and Lesbian Newspaper

The peeps

Audience members will feel like voyeurs in the ingeniously staged 'Reason,' at the Market Theater

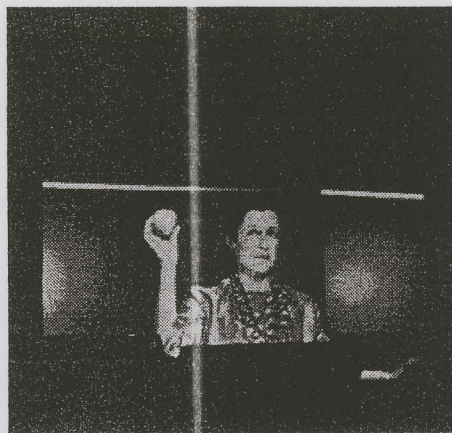
by Robert Nesti

'Reason,' written and directed by Ping Chong and Michael Rohd, at the Market Theatre, Cambridge, **through March 17.**

"Reason," a collaborative theater piece by theater artists Ping Chong and Michael Rohd, is something of a post-modern version of a Robert Altman film. As in "Short Cuts," a number of different stories are told, but the difference here is that they never connect in any physical sense. Yet spiritually you sense these diverse characters, who range from globe-trotting romantics to a meek businessman who seeks solace in a phone sex line and a college professor on the verge of a nervous breakdown, are seeking some kind of connection that will somehow give their lives meaning.

In one case a serene young woman seeks it through her choice of becoming a nun; in another a stroke victim looks to his physical therapist for companionship. In turn the therapist, a young Russian émigré, searches for some sort of career that will ground her in her adopted land. The most obvious story line follows the attempt of a 20-something young man to find his soul mate as he travels the world. He thinks he may have found her in the person of a young woman he meets on the train to St. Petersburg, but is she willing to commit?

Not only is the narrative concept unusual, but so is the presentation. The stories are viewed through panels that open and close to reveal the characters from their waists up. This "Rear Window"-like effect immediately makes the audience voyeurs,



Beth Phillips in 'Reason'

peering into the lives of these characters from a distance.

The result feels like some sort of art installation—a box through which many questions about contemporary life are asked with no attempt at providing the answers. It is an intuitive and provocative work that, despite its rigorous aesthetic, is never dull. It doesn't fall together in a conventional sense; rather, it's an invigorating theatrical puzzle that plays like a waking dream. The cast, a mix of professional actors and students from Harvard, play their various roles with conviction and sincerity. Especially fine is young Eliza Rose Fichter, a young actress whose letter-perfect rendering of her doomed mother's academic lecture is a marvel of skillful impersonation. ▼

For tix (\$30 general admission; \$25 seniors and MGBH members; \$10 students) to 'Reason,' call 617-576-0808. The Market Theater is at One Winthrop Square, Cambridge.