



Allston By James Comtois Directed by Pete Boisvert

Productions Gene Frankel Theatre 24 Bond St. (206-1515) Equity showcase (closes Nov. 19) Review by Sheila Mart

As a well-directed production of an intermissionless play (a current style on today's theatrical scene), *Allston* serves as what must be a cathartic experience for the playwright, James Comtois. In the program notes, he admits to having lived in Allston, a poor neighborhood of Boston, the setting of this piece. The story, what there is of it, centers on a group of students living in a dorm and seemingly proud of how effectively they, and others of their peers (whom we don't see) are trashing the house and the neighborhood. The piled-up garbage in their apartment, including the cat's dirty litter box, is treated as a huge joke. Each one of them, to some degree, is obsessed with garbage, especially that dumped on the street. They speculate - to great length - on what people discard and who, and when it is picked over and items removed.

There is a strange Chinese man, who has been hanging around on the street opposite their building for several hours. He provides an all-consuming interest for the students, which is not difficult, given their lack of motivation for studying or planning for a meaningful future. Their solution to deal with this situation - get high. So what follows is a pot-smoking scene reminiscent of the '60s, which lasts way too long and is not funny. Like sex, doing drugs is a participatory experience, not voyeuristic, and thus is not theatrical. Into this *mêlée* enters Mandy (**Sharon Eisman**), girlfriend of Dave (**Adam Heffernan**), who interjects some sanity into the situation. Her appearance is long overdue. She pursues the mystery of the Chinese man, inviting him in to use the phone, as he appears to be locked out. The first part of this piece needs cutting - the constant cursing (while true for real-life students) does not make up for the lack of meaningful dialogue.

Eventually a Chinese couple from the house across the street comes out, saying that this man, Boy (**Lyndon Salas**) is always hanging around, and they want him to go away - he is NOT their relative, but crazy. One of the couple, Lu (**Jim Yue**), finally vents his anger on all the students who have taken over his neighborhood; they have desecrated it, and, because their parents pay the escalating rents, have pushed the normal citizens out. Mr. Comtois takes too long getting to this confrontation, which would have had more impact had it been addressed earlier. Right now, it is unbalanced - there needs to be a little more of the Chinese side of the conflict.

Pete Boisvert's direction was smooth and succinct. **All the actors maintained a high performance level and differentiated their characters.** Gilpin, **Eisman**, Yue, Salas, and **Rosa Luo** (Woman) were **particularly impressive.** Heffernan, in a thin role, **Christopher Bujold** (Eddie), and **Jim Ward** (Policeman) provided everything that's written.

The costumes (unaccredited) were just right, and the set was well-designed. Stage Manager **Sean Sterling** should certainly take credit for the latter two aspects.