

The Undercurrents of Desire

by JOHN TOWNSEND

HOMOS IN THE HOUSE

Djola Branner's comedy-drama, *Homos in the House*, presented by Intermedia Arts and the Walker Art Center at the Intermedia Arts Auditorium, was a breakthrough play on several fronts. It aggressively indicted homophobia in the black community from a

THEATER black perspective. It dealt passionately with the agonizing issue of AIDS without a trace of sanctimony. And it ruthlessly exposed unjust and abusive behaviors done in the name of Jesus Christ without Christian-bashing. Intensely gay-specific, it is also a brilliant statement on sexual hypocrisy in general and the scapegoating it can instigate.

Homos in the House meditates on the true life account of an idealistic religious studies student, Rashan Alan Davis (Joe Wilson, Jr.) who is black, openly gay, and proud of both. Rashan is appointed AIDS Awareness Coordinator at the black university he attends, but when he uses the position as a springboard to mount an antihomophobia campaign, he meets with resistance on several fronts. The school's bureaucracy, fearful of losing local church funding, makes it clear that Rashan's work needs to be limited to AIDS awareness in a heterosexual context. And brothers in an afrocentric fraternity make it clear that to be black, tough and straight is paramount; to be black, sensitive and gay is anathema.

Rashan falls in love with Lemy Williams (Marc R. Payne), a timid and confused photojournalist, and nurtures him through the painful process of simply 'coming out' to himself. These scenes were some of the most exquisitely tender moments I've ever seen played between two men on a stage. Here, both the nuanced acting and the intelligent and sensitive direction underscored playwright Branner's intimate understanding of how interwoven are the political and intimate realms of his characters' lives. Actor Wilson navigates between the two with a magnificently heroic sense of truth. Branner's work is deeply and beautifully New Testament in its import; paradoxically, those characters considered heathens by the play's educational/religious establishment are in reality the true Christians.

Director Carlos Murillo's cast balanced shining individual performances with a seamless sense of ensemble unity. Standout supporting performances included Payne's delicate yet virile portrayal of Lemy; Daniel Alexander Jones, who was fabulously witty and wise as a transgender pilgrim; Michele Moore/Melvin Lamore; and Gregory Stewart Smith's lyrically spoken manifestation of university President Holgate. So complete was Smith's performance that the audience was made to feel the depth of sad-

ness created in the character's life by his sexual double standard, to feel the shame and humiliation of his fall.