

THEATER REVIEW

The Violist, the Tease and Friends, Gay and Unhappy

By ANITA GATES

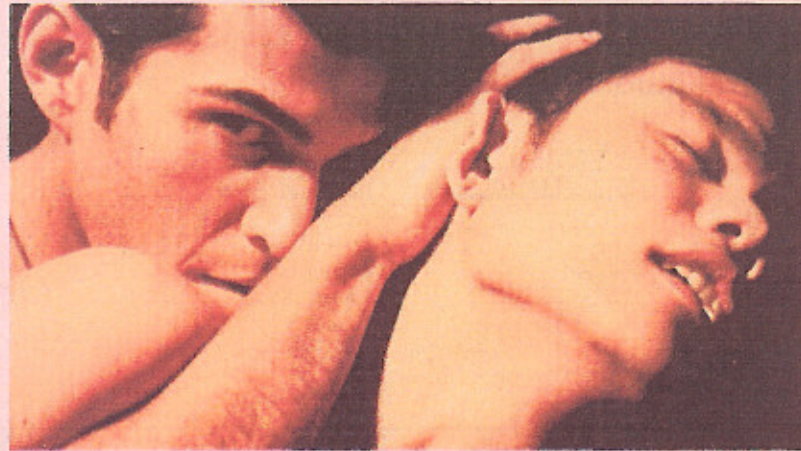
Alex S. DeFazio's "Radium: A Study of Five Figures" operates on the "Now that I have your attention" principle. The first scene is of two naked men simulating anal sex.

One is the play's would-be hero, Alexis (as in Alex S., one presumes). The other, J., is the most interesting creation in this five-character work.

J. (Bobby Abid) is a devastatingly good-looking guy whose favorite game is picking up men, bringing them home and then refusing to satisfy them sexually. He has many opportunities to do this. "I've never been rejected, not as I am," he says, preening convincingly. "And that's what's important: the present, the now."

Apparently J. wasn't always so physically perfect. He spent every penny he had on cosmetic surgery and whatever other methods were available to sculpture himself into

"Radium: A Study of Five Figures" continues through April 16 at the Jewel Box Theater, 312 West 36th Street, Manhattan, (212) 868-4444.



Priyanka Dasgupta

Bobby Abid, left, as J. and Nathaniel P. Claridad as Alexis in "Radium."

this state, and now he acts out his intense, largely unexplained anger by using that beauty to torture other people.

Unfortunately, "Radium," now at the tiny Jewel Box Theater, isn't about J. Or much of anything else. The play does have an inventive Pinteresque structure, ending with the beginning. But basically Mr. DeFazio has written two acts of college-

boy poetry that are vaguely about being gay, looking for emotional connections and feeling uncomfortable about it all. The symbolism of the title, a comment on purity and toxicity, is particularly strained.

This is a story of intertwined lives. Alexis (Nathaniel P. Claridad) is unhappy — inexplicably, since most of the time he is adored and wanted by other men. And he finds transcend-

'Radium'

Jewel Box Theater

ence in the viola, which he plays professionally. Louis (Dustyn Gulledge), a preoperative transsexual, is conflicted about his sexual identity, a state reflected by an actress (Elizabeth Sugarman) who is almost always at Mr. Gulledge's side, representing the woman inside the man's body. Louis's boyfriend, Ryan (Thay Floyd), is not completely supportive of the sex-change plan but is financing the surgery. Zachary (Jon Deliz) was raped by his cousin and, for a long time, sought out abusive men as a result. At one point, Zachary announces, "It's a terrifying proposition, really looking into yourself," but it isn't at all clear what he finds there.

The cast is attractive and emits bursts of skilled acting here and there, despite Jody P. Person's somewhat solemn direction, but "Radium" needs more focus. Its characters never seem to learn the difference between soul-searching and navel-gazing.

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