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theatre scenes ◀

Sober Steel's societal drama

By JON KAPLAN

STEEL KISS, by Robin Fulford. Directed by Ken McDougall. With Ron Jenkins, David Kinsman, Greg Morris and Jack Nichol森. A Platform 9 production in association with Buddies in Bad Times. Poor Alex Theatre, 296 Brunswick, 927-8998. Through October 18.

The hardest-hitting drama now in town is a mere hour long. But in that time, Robin Fulford's *Steel Kiss* presents a strong indictment of a society that turns "normal" young men into killers.

The play — presented in a somewhat different form in last year's 4-Play Festival — was suggested by the murder of a gay man in High Park by four teenagers several years ago. Fulford has focused not on the death itself but on the reasons for this kind of unpremeditated violence.

In a number of short scenes, Fulford shows the four men (played by Ron Jenkins, David Kinsman, Greg Morris and Jack Nichol森) increasingly frustrated on all fronts. The school system promises them a future that won't arrive; they are expected to "score" with women but meet constant rejections. It seems that all they have to turn to is beer and bragging — much of it sexual in nature.

Their pent-up anger finds voice in prejudice of all sorts, from racial to homophobic. Prejudice often has a sexual component, as if nothing were more important than the supreme coital experience. "This got-

ta to be better than an orgasm," one says just before they attack.

The event sobers them up. They voice a kind of choral refrain to condone their actions ("It was an accident," "We were drinking," "Things got out of hand," "We didn't really mean to hurt him"), but nothing is explained by their mumbled apologies.

Clues to their motives come in other scenes, in which the four actors play a variety of figures, from preachers to strippers, a TV-fixated family to a number of gay men (including the man who dies). Fulford and director Ken McDougall have shaped and arranged the scenes in a non-chronological order, so the action always cuts back to the park and violent climactic crescendo.

The technique is especially effective in one group of scenes that moves back and forth between a police interrogation and a partying episode. Mood changes are as swift — and as cutting — as a dagger's slash.

McDougall is emerging as one of the most sensitive directors in town staging naturalistic drama. He has tightened the work since its 4-Play production. The only thing I miss from that earlier staging is the tenderness of the last scene, an almost elegiac encounter in the park. Here it's as impersonal as stone.



Jack Nichol森 (left), Greg Morris, Ron Jenkins and David Kinsman play four young men whose violent actions lead to murder in Robin Fulford's *Steel Kiss*, at the Poor Alex through October 18.

The performers bring their own strengths to the roles, though Morris hasn't the same intensity of focus as the other three. Another asset to the production is Stephan Droege's environmental set of park, trees, streetlamp and benches; most of the audience sits watching an arena where the action takes place.

Steel Kiss doesn't answer all the questions it raises, but it offers some pieces to the puzzle of a violent society. Though it plays with sociological ideas, there's no question that it's highly effective theatre.