

## **Show Guide**

### **Off-Off Broadway December 06, 2001**

#### Foot of the Wall and Man with Bags

Reviewed By Victor Gluck

Ionesco's one-act "The Foot of the Wall" and full-length "Man with Bags," which ended up on the same bill in the Ionesco Festival's rotating repertory, are variations on the same theme: the way travelers are treated in foreign lands. Ironically, once again, the one-act, "The Foot Of the Wall," as directed by Rob Reese in the Donald Watson translation, said it all more swiftly and cogently than the longer play.

"The Foot Of the Wall" presented by Amnesia Wars Productions with The Process Studio Theatre and the Ionesco Festival Short Play Program, Nov. 9-Dec. 16, in various venues.

"Man With Bags" presented by and at The Looking Glass Theatre in association with the Ionesco Festival, 422 W. 57 St., NYC, Nov. 14-Dec. 16.

The interlocking stories in "Wall" include a husband and wife, some female natives, the lover they fight over, and a guide. Although the costuming wasn't much, and Jennifer Revit's set for "Man with Bags" was of little to help "Wall" atmospherically, Danny O'Brien's lover was convincingly French, while Tamara Gura demonstrated her range in two totally contrasting roles.

"Man With Bags" premiered in America in 1975 in the Israel Horovitz adaptation from a translation by the playwright's daughter, Marie-France Ionesco. Performed in 19 scenes, the play is long, repetitious, and ultimately tedious. Maybe Ionesco's nightmare world has become so commonplace that we are no longer surprised by its cruelties or absurdities.

At first glance, the play seems a strange choice for the all-female Looking Glass Theatre, as most of the characters are men. However, the characters are actually gender-free, so that ultimately it makes little difference. Using the personable Carolyn McDermott as the exiled Traveler, plus an ensemble of eight, director Julie Fei-Fan Balzer gave "Man with Bags" sharp, crisp performances, with each actress playing many roles very differently. Unfortunately, like the realistic costumes by Sarah Hill, this dated play needs a more surrealistic approach.

All the performers shone in various moments, often unrecognizable under the painted faces of makeup stylist Katherine Harte. Among the outstanding sequences were Kimberly VerSteeg's woman on the telephone, VerSteeg and Rebecca Thomas' Germanic police officers, Katie Northlich as the officious ambassador, and Brenda Withers as her cynical secretary. The rest of the hard-working cast was made up of Sandra Blaney, Elizabeth Elson, Vickie Varnuska, and Duyen Washington.