

Teens exposed to eye-opening rape message

Friday, April 21st, 2006

By Kevin Prokosh

Theatre Review

Bang Boy, Bang

Manitoba Theatre for Young People

Tonight and tomorrow at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets: \$12.50

Four stars out of five

IT is no wonder that Rod's life is blowing up in his face. The 16-year-old has been navigating a social minefield of parental adultery, brotherly misogyny, prostitutes, gonorrhoea, telephone sex lines, drunkenness and out of control hormones.

That's all on his beer-befuddled mind when he wakes up in the gritty teen drama *Bang Boy, Bang* to the telephone accusation that he sexually assaulted a girl named Laura the night before.

Montreal playwright Ed Roy is not satisfied to get to first or second base in his unblinking 50-minute reality play but is intent on going all the way in exposing the mindset of a young date rapist. Roy and director Michael Lefebvre focus solely on the perspective of the abuser who has been socially engineered to think a girl's no really means yes.

The action takes place entirely on Rod's bed where we find him face down at the beginning of the season's final Manitoba Theatre for Young People production, attended by a school audience yesterday. The floor is littered with coloured wires to suggest the inner working of his brain, which is trying to make sense of a terrible mistake. Actor Anthony Johnston shares the stage with a video screen depicting twitchy images of Laura and Rod talking to himself.

What ensures the success of *Bang Boy, Bang* is convincing teen audiences that Rod is not some cold sexual predator but an everyguy who couldn't control himself because he was under the influence of beer and sketchy ideas about women. Johnston, a talented former Winnipegger back home, is totally believable.

Roy offers choices as to who to blame besides the accused. His hard-ass father has been cheating on his mother. His misguided brother treats Rod to a hooker who infects him with an STD. His pal Taylor describes losing his virginity as banging and now all he wants to is "bang boy, bang." The playwright wisely doesn't attempt to show how Rod will deal with what he's done, content in the fact that he has enlightened teens as to how they might avoid a similar fate.

Although young people are blitzed daily with sexual images from magazines, television, music videos and advertising, rape is a subject that doesn't get an open, frank discussion very often. *Bang Boy, Bang* makes a lot of noise on the subject and all of it worth listening to for teens.