

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large. Lynn Nottage's INTIMATE APPAREL is an emotionally fertile, consistently entertaining and, at times a highly amusing play. Its rather diverse half dozen characters are all connected in one way or another to Esther Mills, a seamstress in Manhattan who makes ladies undergarments. She's worked her way up and out of the cotton fields of North Carolina where her parents were once slaves. The time is 1905.

Her fine skills at sewing have brought her a wide array of clients and helped her put aside a nest egg to someday open a beauty parlor. We get to know two of the women. One is a confused, unloved fifth avenue socialite, well on her way to becoming an alcoholic. She and Esther are best friends within limitations imposed by the time of the action. The other is a fun loving, piano playing prostitute.

In the pivotal role of Esther, Nadine Mozon gives a deeply touching, compassionate performance. She works with simple clarity to offer a beautifully scaled portrayal of this thirty five year old virgin spinster. What

she does is never too much or too little but exactly right. Her relationships to the other characters are distinctly defined and varied. With Mrs. Van Buren, the socialite, depicted with bitter coldness by Kristie Dale Sanders, there is restrained closeness. With the lady of the night, Mayme, done with delightful hell raising fun by Laiona Michelle, she is relaxed, and bends her religion a bit to share the other woman's carefree life. While Mayme's piano playing is not for the concert hall, in one scene she belts out a fire hot rendition of "Handyman". Esther lets her hair down and joins in to sing and do a quite fetching cake walk to the music. Mayme sings so well that you wonder why she didn't pursue a career in show business. It may be because her chosen profession offers a more steady income.

Esther's life, while busy and financially rewarding, is lonely. She sees little likelihood of marriage. One day, though, her world changes. A letter arrives from a man named George Armstrong. He's working on a crew building the Panama Canal. Esther's name was given to him by a deacon of her church. They correspond but others write the letters for them. When we see George in Panama, he seems a gentle, almost poetic fellow,

with a kind heart and love of nature's beauty. He ultimately arrives in New York, Marries Esther, and is suddenly a totally different person. As done, the change seems a bit abrupt. He doesn't take well to the city of concrete. Kennedy Pugh is George Armstrong. He's an imposing figure of a man who knows his way around the stage, but his performance is marred by a very heavy Caribbean accent that makes it very difficult to understand his words, especially in the second act.

Esther buys her fabric from Mr. Marks, a Romanian Jew who works from his small five floor walk up on the lower east side. Howard Kaye is absolutely wonderful as this orthodox, lonely refugee awaiting the arrival of a prearranged wife from his native land. With exceptional control, he gradually reveals his changing feelings about Esther, as she does toward him. His performance stands out as a hallmark of good acting. The scenes between him and Esther are the most captivating in the production. Sadly, one realizes that there is no way they can ever go beyond a rather formal friendship.

A double bed dominates the set by Bill Clarke. The assorted locales of the play take place in different areas

of the space. The residence is run with a tight hand by Mrs. Dickerson played with flare by the statuesque Elizabeth Van Dyke. The changes of place are accomplished by rearranging the quilt on the bed, a device that seems over worked and slows down the flow of the play. Jane Page directed this production with feeling and efficiency. One wishes she had lent a keener ear to the diction problems that often accompany stage dialects.

Nanzi Adzima has designed the intimate apparel in bright colors that are a precursor to Victoria's Secret creations. The costumes suggest intimacy, a quality that is lacking in the lives of the women of the play who wear them and in the men they encounter. The need to be close to someone and the pain of betrayal of trust make up the substance of this heartwarming theatrical experience. For WHRO-FM, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.