

# Subtle dig at the Monstrous (male) Regiment

Portsmouth rarely plays host to a theatrical world premiere, yet it did so last night with the minimum of fuss.

"Kiss and Kill" was presented for the first time at Portsmouth College of Art and Design by the Monstrous Regiment, a London-based company formed two years ago with the aim of exploring — and perhaps improving — the lot of women.

An advance note about the play did not seem too promising — a company of nine women and two men seemed rather off balance and a play about man's violence to woman suggested a depressing evening of rape and wife battering.

But the Monstrous Regiment, and particularly co-author / director Susan Todd, were not going to fall

into this trap.

They did not need to be told that the best way to get a serious message across is to make the medium entertaining, preferably funny in parts, and to be subtle.

So "Kiss and Kill" manages to put over a message about the oppressive nature of the threat many women feel of violence from men without a single display of such violence.

In fact, it is the women who appear to be the violent ones. A former battered wife hits her son in temper. The same woman threatens a friend's aggressive boyfriend with a broken bottle. A teenager shows off the karate she has learned to fight off men, and

a jilted girlfriend smashes up her boyfriend's car and stereo to get her own back.

## OPPRESSION

But the oppression shows through — most clearly when it is lifted for the surprisingly optimistic ending.

The play takes the form of a series of sketches, linked by songs from the powerfully voiced musician / composer / actor Josefina Cupido.

The form has its faults — at times it was too disjointed and the overall length, particularly of the first half, would have been better for being a little shorter.

It seemed to pack just too

much into a single evening.

But for the range of content, it was economically written and compactly presented. And the set design, by Stefanie Howard, was a touring company's dream — a single free-standing structure, like a large fitted wardrobe, became in turn a bedroom complete with bed, living room, office, kitchen and garden shed, simply by opening or shutting a door.

The company's Southern tour lasts all this week. There are performances at Itchen College, Southampton, tonight and the Tower Arts Centre, Winchester, on Saturday.

S.A.

Popular Theatre Troupe of  
Queensland.

~~7.30. £1.20, mems £1.~~

TIME OUT  
DEC '77

From Mon:

'Kiss and Kill' by Susan Todd  
and Ann Mitchell, presented by  
Monstrous Regiment.

'Kiss and Kill' (Monstrous Regi-  
ment).

A fast moving and schematic  
survey of some of the patterns of  
domestic violence in our society,  
where boredom and alienation  
outside are often expressed in  
physical and psychological vio-  
lence in the family. A number of  
story lines interweave—a mother  
persecuted by violent phone  
calls, a wife driven into silence  
by a non-understanding husband.  
The schematic form has an am-  
bivalent effect; on the one hand  
making it clearly a play of ideas,  
expressed through cameo  
moments, but on the other over-  
loading the evening with plot  
lines. Some very funny moments  
show how women draw strength  
for their individual solutions, and  
note a set full of surprises, and  
exceptional musical punctuation  
in between scenes. (Michelene  
Victor)

Mon 7.00, from Tue 7.30. Ring  
theatre for prices.

## EXETER

Allen Saddler

### Kiss and Kill

KISS and Kill is not a Micky Spillane spoof, far from it. It is about the violence in everyday life; mainly about the violence that men inflict on women. It carries several bitter little stories of obtuse women and long suffering women. There is some sharp humour, but the total effect is depressing. I'm sure all the incidents depicted are well-founded and may be widespread, but after seeing a number of these case-history plays I am getting stuck with a jaundiced outlook. Surely some women must have had some fun with some men at some time?

Monstrous Regiment are a strong acting group who rather specialise in over stating their case. This long scream of agony is all on one note and soon deadens the sympathetic nerve. I can't help thinking that the cause would have been better served by a fuller development of one story, allowing time for real characters to emerge from the stereotypes.

The form—short themes, some very short and some just monologues, linked together by fatalistic soul singing — is slow and feels as though it was written under the influence of television drama or with television in mind. There are too many breaks to maintain interest and continuity. True to life maybe, honest and well-observed, and ingenious screen set, nicely acted; many things can be said in favour of Kiss and Kill and yet somehow it isn't very effective. The drama is all in the dialogue, a conflict in words only, and the characters fail to engage sympathy. Even at this level, it is much too long. Gillian Hanna is outstanding as the besieged wife as is Mary McCusker as the realistic Angie.

# The kissing had to stop . . .

### *Kiss and Kill Crucible Studio*

Lou gets obscene phone calls from her estranged husband.

Sally occasionally sleeps with Pete, who automatically assumes she is his for life when he finally leaves his bored and housebound wife.

Angie for once gets serious about a man, but he decides in the solicitor's office that he is ditching her and the divorce and taking a second honeymoon.

Two things stand out about these three case histories. First, we are all guilty — which lets just about everybody off the hook. Second, Lou and Sally and Angie could have been selected for the dramatis personae of a feminist play by a dating computer.

It is therefore a consider-

able tribute to the commitment and acting power of the Monstrous Regiment company that this play works at all on the stage.

Susan Todd, co-author with Ann Mitchell, directs it with tact instead of ramming it down your throat. Josefina Cupido supplies incidental songs which seem to reflect the scenes exactly — well detailed, well played, but not joined by any thread you can follow for long.

The plot does, however, pull itself together in the second half when Pete leaves home and things start to happen — particularly a confrontation with Sally's flatmate Lou. And Gillian Hanna contributes an excellent, fierce, sympathetic performance as the badly bruised Lou.

**TIM BROWN.**

# Kiss and Kill

MONSTROUS Regiment is a feminist theatre group. Their latest show has been presented at the Round House Downstairs by the London Borough of Camden and has played to full houses. Susan Todd and Ann Mitchell have devised "Kiss and Kill" around two generations and two separate marriages at a state of wilt. Stephanie Howard's excellent set — giving a new meaning to the word "box" — folds easily from one household to another, indoors to outdoors. The acting is accomplished and the characters tolerably credible.

Where it comes unstuck is with the relentless hammering home of the messages. Josefina Cupido's self-accompanied songs in a jazz idiom do this very successfully at the side of the acting area to cover scene changes but, like so much preaching theatre, the production as a whole is not prepared to let us make up our own minds — it insists in making them up for us. The violence which is omnipresent in the abusive phone calls Lou receives from her ex-husband, in Pete's relationships with his wife, daughter and girl-friend, in the daughter's gang of friends in the women's own social interplay — all this requires subtlety which the authors seem perfectly capable of providing. Only they haven't done it. At considerable length.

Clive Russell is very good as the husband, and Gillian Hanna is extremely moving as the wife in the other marriage. Other parts are played by Chris Bowler, Mary McCusker, Roger Allam, Helen Glavin and Susan Todd. M.A.M.