

## theater

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them is language, which they use to insulate themselves from hopelessness or to inflict wounds upon one another. In the land of the unwavering toothpaste smile, Kondoleon's genius for dramatizing unadulterated anguish is sorely needed—and missed.

Like all his furious and florid plays, *Christmas on Mars* offers heaps of nearly insurmountable challenges. Set in a gloomy New York apartment where four miserably self-absorbed people imagine that the arrival of a baby will somehow transform them into responsible adults, the play seems to run in all directions at once. Radiant Theatre spent an entire act trying to pull it into focus, hampered by director Shannon Epplert's curious penchant for placing his actors where they upstage one another. But in the second act nearly everything falls into place—except Epplert's awkward staging. The cast exchange their first-act petulance for the kind of steely brutality the script requires, communicating numerous moments of breathtaking despair the likes of



photo/Steve Shoy

which few doing Kondoleon ever achieve. —Justin Hayford

**BEHIND THE CURTAINS**, *Hidden Theatre*, at the Greenview Arts Center. The most dangerous sort of radical is the one who acts in accordance with a personal vision. Tahereh, the 19th-century Irani poet whose life and teachings helped found the Baha'i faith, was such a revolutionary. Ezzat Goushegir's *Behind the Curtains*

paints a heroic portrait of the young woman whose father broke with Islamic tradition to give her an education, even allowing her to study the Koran, only to find himself the father of a full-blown crusader. After a pilgrimage to her teacher's shrine, Tahereh left her family to travel among strangers, in the company of men, whom she permitted to see her unveiled face—abominations to conservative Moslems then as now—all

in the name of a messiah preaching a new gospel that propounded, among other outrages, men's and women's spiritual and temporal equality.

Goushegir's version of Tahereh's story is of necessity highly simplified, and director Hannah Gale keeps her production likewise spare and elegant, augmenting the lyrical text with eloquent visual images—notably the dance sequences choreographed and performed by Jennifer Savarirayan—

and archetypal characterizations (led by Carlotta Ramos as the saintly Tahereh, with Circus-Szalewski contributing some nicely comical villains). Those familiar with Baha'i history will probably get more from this pageantlike play than those who are ignorant of it, but Tahereh's message of liberation as well as the knowledge that her teachings are banned in her homeland to this day should make *Behind the Curtains* intriguing to audiences of all cultures and creeds.

—Mary Shen Barnidge

**PLEIADES RISING**, at *Mary-Archie Theatre*. The only things this mismatched trio of theatrical pieces have in common are oblique references to the titular star cluster and the fact that none of them works particularly well. Best of the bunch is Tim Joyce's *Six Great Conversations*, a wistful reminiscence of the author's late father. More a long monologue interrupted by brief scenes, Joyce's touching play contains a number of moments that resonate with honesty.

But regrettably the father and son never come fully to life, because Joyce never tells us much more than that he really loved his dad, who was strong and kind but difficult to know. The conversations—which reveal a child's curiosity about death and religion—are all so short that they feel somewhat generic. As loving but tenuously performed by the affable Mark Vanasse and Hans Summers, *Six Great Conversations* feels more like a staged reading than a fully produced play. Like the script, it's respectful but distant and at times dull.

Joyce's play is followed by some amusing but tentatively delivered poetry by Chris Hyatt, who would have been able to drown out the finger snapping at a Green Mill slam. Closing the evening is a no-holds-barred production of Lanford Wilson's incest tragedy *Home Free!* The work of baseball-bat subtlety by normally reliable Wilson, about a rationally childish brother and

Life is short.