



GAL TALK Samantha Livingston (left) and Jamie Gandola in a scene from the CSUC production of *Nice People Dancing to Good Country Music*.

11.29.90

film review

Texas Twosome

'Toys for Men'

'Nice People Dancing to Good Country Music'

Wisner Theater, CSUC

Other plays have covered this material better, but the pair of student-directed one-acts that closes Chico State's fall schedule is generally entertaining and sometimes hilarious.

Directors Charmaine Colvin and Michael Gannon have moderate success drawing out the best aspects of Lee Blessing's complementary comedies.

Really two acts of the same play, Blessing's plots run together: Mysterious 22-year-old niece Catherine has unexpectedly shown up at the Nice People Bar to stay with her aunt Eva and Jim, the man with whom Eva lives.

Toys for Men shows the men's side—Jim's friend Roy fancies himself in love with Catherine—and *Nice People Dancing to Good Country Music* revolves around Cather-

ine's relationships with Eva and Roy.

The format and characters are directly evocative of James McLure, whose husbands-and-wives pair *Lone Star* and *Laundry and Bourbon*—written a few years earlier—make frequent local appearances. Blessing even writes the same type of dialogue between dumb-guy-who-thinks-he's-smart and dumb-guy-who-knows-he's-dumb.

McLure's lines are funnier, and we've seen his plays here recently, but Blessing's plays are nevertheless enjoyable, peppered with one-liners and interesting characters.

The conversation topics are standard-issue: men and women ("Men are not like you and me," Eva tells her niece), mid-life crisis ("You want to know the worst part?" Jim says to Roy. "I'm satisfied."), and young, inexperienced romance ("It's great being in love, ain't it?" Roy says).

At times the plays seem to be centered around the kind of aphorisms that sound lifted from a '50s movie:

Jim says, "No matter how much pleasure you draw from a woman, it ain't worth two minutes with a mean kid," and "Love don't repair your life, it wrecks it."

Eva chimes in with "Living together is for having someone around; marriage is for hav-

ing someone around your neck" and "Love is an evil pain in the butt."

Toys is clearly the weaker of the two pieces—there's nothing to grab our attention at the beginning, and the play-long conversation between Jim (Jeff McGrath) and Roy (Jim Hiser) drags. Except for two brief appearances by Jim's disrespectful 15-year-old stepson (Tom LaMere), *Toys'* script is witty but curiously lifeless.

It falls to director Charmaine Colvin to add levels and dynamics, and the elements just aren't there. While *Toys* far surpasses Colvin's previous directorial efforts, the awful *Acrobatics* and *Laughing Wild*, it won't do much to improve her standing.

The longer (50 minutes) *Nice People* picks up the pace somewhat; a long conversation between the industrious Eva (Jamie Gandola) and the out-of-place Catherine (Samantha Livingston)—a novice whose unfortunate habit of blurting out obscenities has forced her to leave the convent—moves along nicely, and inept suitor Roy adds some wonderful moments.

Most of the actors have to stretch a little to fit their roles, but performances are generally good.

The tremendously talented Livingston adds delightful physical touches to the precise, soft-spoken Catherine; Gandola, largely reprising her role from *Laundry and Bourbon* six months ago, is a natural as Eve; Hiser, with a goofy grin and thumbs hooked into his jeans, demonstrates great comic timing as "I know I'm dull" Roy; the boyish LaMere, again cast as a teenager, is convincing; the hard-working McGrath is at his best, which is not quite up to the level set by the others.

Staging is minimal—the *Toys* set consists of a truck frame in a parking lot, and *Nice People* takes place on a deck overlooking the lot. The latter set is used particularly well, with characters leaning over the edge to shout down