

Review:

You'll love them. You'll hate them.

You'll love it. You'll hate it.

You'll try to forget. You can't.

You'll debate it.

Who's good? Who's bad?

Who's honest? Who's mad?

Here's a clue: They're all bad.

The altruists in "The Altruists" at The Laboratory Theater of Florida have a show for you.

Playwright Nicky Silver constructs this tale of five layabout big-city dwellers, lounging across three squalid apartments, sleeping with anything that moves, drinking and eating the same. Life, such that it is, falls apart when soap opera actress Sydney shoots her cheating lover Ethan in a drug-fueled rage. He tried to suffocate her, then ignored her command to beg her to stay.

Longtime Fort Myers thespian James Recca directs a cast that includes veteran amateurs Scott Carpenter, Lucy Harris and Tera Nicole Miller, along with Joseph Yazvac as streetwise prostitute Lance. Los Angeles transplant Val White joined the cast after rehearsals began, bringing a sly hoppy British vibe to screw—the-world Ethan.

"Altruists," even with a Saturday night crowd decimated by Edison Festival of Light traffic, delivers a tight, smart show. Harris crafts the perfect portrait of daytime diva Montana Beach (Brick? Or Brock? "I get letters by the trillions!"). Her long, elegant, diffident and entirely too self-absorbed monologue starts the show on just the right haughty hipster note.

Harris stalks the stage in towering two-tone heels, making pronouncements like "I love you Ethan," before pumping bullets into a prone body. She's hypoglycemic. She's on Atkins. Wait, did that bout of reverse-cowgirl sex cause her to "take in" carbs? Sydney's extreme degree of over-acting is on display through the night, from dramatic leans against door frames to fall-down faints.

Joseph Yazvac makes a fair bid to steal the show (and Ronald's overactive heart) as the barely clothed hustler who wanders into this mess. You'll love him from the moment he mutters "You got any coke?" And he doesn't mean soda. Yazvac and Carpenter (playing a role written for a twentysomething with charming skill) make a wonderful couple as they frolic under the covers and delicately negotiate the price of love.

Val White delights as the smarmy Ethan. I love the casual "whatever" style, the Union Jack socks" and "I'll do anything/anyone" attitude. He and Harris get enormous laughs

during their coital scene, played beside a very dead corpse. Look too for Naples native Miller's psychotic Sybil (note the name); she plays a conniving "intellectual lesbian." The character switches from hot to cold to boys to girls to insane at the flick of a spotlight. Watch the plots (and little else!) turn inside her head.

Silver's script demands audiences face hard questions. His play, presented as a grand profane soap opera farce, uses ridiculous situations to highlight the insanity of consumerism, society, intellectual dishonesty, a fascination with image and even a permanent protest society. Of the play's characters, consider who makes the most honest choices? The answer may surprise you.

"Altruists" might be the best show mounted by the Lab Theater since its move to the Kiwanis space. Recca found a solid script and a cast that sank effortlessly into their parts. I wish the attention to detail he put into the acting made its way into the rest of the show.

Recca approaches the show from the perspective of an actor, interpreting the script in a straightforward, almost literal direction. Audiences face the triple apartment set head-on, without the slightest angles for perspective or variation. I wish the playing spaces had been angled to a point at the front of the stage, instead of squared off.

Recca also asks his cast to treat the non-existent walls as reality, trapping much of the action in each scene inside a four-foot space. Actors appear far too aware of the invisible boundaries until the script breaks them in the final scene. That hermetic bubble feels entirely at odds with the show's bed-hopping, wealth-redistributing subtext.

Ron Kelly's lighting designs meet the demands of such a tech-heavy show, which weaves in and out of three spaces in near-constant quick blackouts. Rosie DeLeon handles the board each night. I love the show's costumes; wait for Yazvac's briefs, with a surprise in the front AND the rear. One note: The fashion plate Sydney character references a gorgeous \$800 salmon Richard Tyler suit; it doesn't fit her.

Never take firebombs to a protest rally.