Love and Pieces at Peoples’ Theatre

A.R. Gurney’s Love Course and Corinne Jacker’s Bits and Pieces play at Peoples’ Theatre until December 7.

Peoples’ Theatre continues to be one of my favorite small theatre groups. They have an approach that is always fresh, and a way of concentrating on the dramatic aspects of the work that makes attending one of their performances a concentrated and personal experience. And so it is with their present offering, a double-bill.

When one of the characters in the first piece, Love Course, happens to be an electrical engineering major who loves computers more than people, one feels curiously close to home. But, one need look no farther than the name of the author, A.R. Gurney, to realize that some inspiration must have come from MIT, where Gurney is Professor of Literature.

The play focuses on two teachers of a course on the literature of love, and what happens when their intellectual relationship risks progressing into a physical one. Joan Gale is marvelous as the spinster educator, Miss Carroway, who feels she has a mission, yet is unaware of how the romantic visions of literature translate into life. Ed Sullivan, as the married Professor Burgess, is a down-to-earth and conservative teacher (and power-seeking administrator) with rather less romantic notions. The interplay between the two—she “inspired,” manipulative and quasi-hysterical, he firm, unswerving and repressive of all emotions that do not belong in the classroom—is both amusing and moving. The audience makes up the class. Maybe we have something to learn.

Phillip dies and gives away all parts of his body except his penis. His widow, Iris, goes in search of the bits, in an odyssey to piece her husband together. Corinne Jacker’s Bits and Pieces is a curious work, traveling over the subjects of relationship and psyche. Cynthia Schwell gives an intense performance as Iris, George Moseley III is interesting as Phillip, Susan Bigger as Helen, Phillip’s sister. Not propelled into the dream-world of her sister-in-law, wanting to help, but noncomprehending, she contains her desired fervor well.

Each moment of this play demands the watcher’s whole attention. The pace was a little too slow to make it easy to maintain this attention throughout the show but, aside from this, the acting was good and brought to life this intricate piece of “think-theatre.”

Professor Burgess (Ed Sullivan) extols the virtues of marriage to Mike (Joshua Perlstein) in Love Course. (Photo by Kevin Osborn.)