At no point in the performance does Anderson actually make a statement. She involves much, playing on inconsistencies in language and meaning, taking for granted the audience's ability to make the connections necessary to transform a set of observations into cogent social commentary. We laugh at her description of a doctor who refuses to perform a necessary operation because the patient has no money only because we have probably been exposed to the money-hungry doctor stereotype. Anderson's formula became clear during the performance: Combine a few random observations with reminders of extraneous cultural imagery to create a web of associations, facts, and call the juxtaposition humor. As Village Voice critic Gregory Sanford noted, the result is not unlike making "Zippy the Pinhead." Compare Anderson's "I dreamed I had to take a test in a Dairy Queen on another planet!" with Zippy's "You! Am I in Alaska, Ohio yet?" and you'll find little difference other than Anderson's more serious aspirations.

Most ironic about the show was Anderson's reliance on the technology her artpanions are behind her, and by music, both on tape and performed live. Just what Anderson means is harder to explain because it incorporates-a paradox: Anderson's commentary requires prior knowledge of modern living in order to make its humor work.

REGGIE MONTGOMERY

Ragged Honor Medal

Medal of Honor Rag, written by Tom Cole, directed by Peter Thompson; starring Ralph Pochoda and Reggie Montgomery. Now showing at the Next Move Theatre.

The Next Move Theatre's revival of Medal of Honor Rag is bound to receive good treatment from the Boston area critics, and I'll tell you why: Peter Thompson's direction is well conceived and unhurried, the single unit set is appropriately chilling, and Reggie Montgomery's performance as Dale Jackson, a black Vietnam veteran suffering from 'survivor guilt,' is outstanding. But a great production won't obscure the fact that the script has problems.

The play, written by former MIT professor Tom Cole, is based on the story of Dwight Johnson, one of twenty-two blacks who received the Congressional Medal of Honor for service during the Vietnam war. What little action there is takes place in an office of the Valley Forge Army Hospital. Dale Jackson, the Vet, is brought in to face yet another in a long line of psychiatrists, one from the civilian sector. The drama documets a single session between doctor and patient. We learn of Jackson's problems, the terrible events he witnessed and participated in at "the "Nam," and the conflict he feels about winning his country's highest military decoration by violating his own morals.

We also learn that Medal of Honor Rag is a one-character show that requires two actors for expression. Ralph Pochoda as the Doctor (the author doesn't give him a stage name) admirably attempts to build a character from the scripted lines, but the script only gets in his way. Pochoda's best moments come at the play's opening, when he has plenty of stage business to perform and nothing to say. It is then that we see the character of a harried, coffee-drinking psychiatrist. One should not conclude Tom Cole can't write convincingly characterizations for the stage: Dale Jackson is one of the most fully realized stage characters I have ever seen. He is an intelligent, articulate man with complex psychological problems.

Reggie Montgomery takes command of the author's work so completely that we don't know where Cole's art ends and the actor's invention begins. Every gesture, every word that comes from his mouth, is true to the character. We feel Jackson's anguish; we see how the senselessness of the Vietnam war has devastated his life. Montgomery's performance alone is worth the price of the ticket.

Despite these drawbacks the play is profoundly disturbing. Director Peter Thompson hasn't missed a technical detail in his staging. The set, with its institutional green walls, gray office furniture, and scollcled "No Smok- ing" signs, is immaculately ugly; the Doctor's stiff suit-coat contrasts effectively spite these drawbacks, I still recommend the Doctor's more serious aspirations.

Most ironic about the show was Anderson's reliance on the technology her artpanions are behind her, and by music, both on tape and performed live. Just what Anderson means is harder to explain because it incorporates-a paradox: Anderson's commentary requires prior knowledge of modern living in order to make its humor work.

Laurie Anderson at the Berkley Perfom- 

The United States of Anderson

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