The physicists, by Friedrich Durren-ram, directed by Donald Cress, at the Nucleo Eclettico Theatre, Wednesdays through Saturdays, April 13 through April 23 and May 4 through May 15, curtain at 8 pm.

Picture a dilapidated villa-turned-madhouse. The patients: three seemingly deranged nuclear physicists—one believes he is Newton, another believes he is Einstein, and the last has visions in which King Solomon imparts the secrets of the Universe. Overseeing them is a bunch-hacked passionless psychiatrist; their attendants are beautiful yet athletic female nurses who nonetheless are being murdered one by one.

Sound interesting? Well don’t get your hopes up, what begins as a lively comedy-burlesque becomes a tragicomic melodrama.

Durrenmatt turns them into strawmen. Oscar Knoth’s Police Inspector is a greedy, sneaky buffoon. Cless stages the play well.

For all its comic trappings—a thick-skulled police inspector, a stereotypical hard-nosed nurse, three lovable lunatics—Durren-ram’s The Physicists deals with a serious question: In what way are scientists responsible for the impact their work could destroy the earth, and he’s willing to spend his life locked inside an asylum to protect humanity. We’re talking serious commitment here; in feigning madness, Mobius is forced to alienate his wife and children, and murder the nurse he loves.

We don’t find out about a good deal of this until the middle of the closing act, which in itself isn’t bad, but Durren-ram buries the physicist’s personal losses in buffoonery and an intellectual debate that destroys the stage action. We are treated to a simplistic dialectic on the dangers of scientific knowledge, then mystery unfolds into a simplistic dialectic by one...

Inaccurate Speech of the Heart, Van Morrison on Warner Brothers Records.

Van Morrison’s new album is a new problem for those who feel a particular rapport with this odd popular musician. It cannot convince those who have not the least interest in his music why listening to that music can seem so important.

Morrison’s long career is an almost schizoid alternation between fine music that begs to be played through car radios and more obscure work that would never grace the airwaves. A perfect, completely accessible single like “Brown Eyed Girl” preceded the strange Astral Weeks album, which was followed by “Domino,” another arresting single, and the period of great popularity rooted in the album Moondance. Morrison then submerged from view of his larger audience to make three eccentric albums about some combination of Viet Nam, his native Ireland, and Marlin County, ending his hermitage with the release of another perfect single, “Wavelength.”

Inaccurate Speech of the Heart is related to the two albums that followed “Wavelength.” It turns away from both traditional and contemporary pop music stances to grapple in words and sounds with God and the world’s spirituality.

Morrison deals directly with what artistic manners suggest should be treated esoterically. Heart is about prayer and the belief that prayer will be answered.

The music is a sort of watercolor of synthesizer washes not dissimilar to certain Vangelis soundtracks. Vocals, bell-like guitars, and saxophones are etched atop gospel-styled vocal backdrops. Perhaps now there is a larger venue for this music, but at times it can be insubstantial and middlebrow in its evocations. “Higher Than the World,” The flawless opening cut, avoids pretention, but the remaining tunes vary from simply pretty to pretty good.

Van Morrison has been his ability to convince us that a spirit was to be found in the smallest things, including other people.

Bill Bryant

Planet P. on Griffen Records.

Buying records produced by new groups with only one or two hits is always a gamble. Many record buyers shy away from groups relying on catchy science-fiction lyrics and sings lead vocals, assisted by several acts more as an asset than an irritant, responsible for most of the music’s drive.

Planet P’s basic musical framework is very simple: danceable, traditional rock and roll with science fiction to enhance the lyrics and lost of synthesizers. Most of the songs feature a male in a high-tech situation—"In My Me" he’s on board a spaceship—lamenting leaving the Earth and/or his girl for the vast emptiness of the cosmos. Indeed, this boy-loses-girl-blame-it-on-technology theme seems to be prevalent among many of the neuen stream rock ballads. Criticism of this sort can hardly be considered valid when it originates from a band that relies on heavy synths and rhythm machines.

The music is state-of-the-art in terms of technique and production, but not very innovative. Yet credit is due to the excellent songwriting and the group’s ability to play and, of course, reproduce the best thing about Planet P is currently receiving a fair amount of airplay, and, no doubt, people are growing curious about the rest of their material.

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Planet P is engaging for at least the first few listeners; you might even find yourself nodding your head with some of the catchy tunes in your spaceship. Unfortunately, the album suffers from some of the most insidious of pop music diseases: caution. Experimental or progressive in only the most cursory way, Planet P seems afraid to take any artistic chances that might hamper its commerciality. If you’re still curious, Planet P comes from the planet Pop — look for it between Styx and Asia.

John Stein

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