

Coherent, inventive anarchy



Ruth Schoenheimer, left; Margaret Cameron and Mark Minchinton in *Call of the Wild* ... societally-decreed modesty, bare breasts of nature, and archetypal male roles.

THEATRE
PAMELA PAYNE

CALL OF THE WILD By Jenny Kemp

Directors: Jenny Kemp. Elizabeth Drake

Designer; Jacqueline Everitt

Music: Elizabeth Drake

Lighting: Ken Dray

Cast: Margaret Cameron. Victoria Eagger. Margaret Mills. Mark Minchinton and Ruth Schoenheimer Belvoir Street March 6

PLAYWRIGHT-director Jenny Kemp defies most expectations of dramatic production. *Call of the Wild* has neither plot narrative nor identifiable characters. Performance style is in hectic flux: familiar and naturalistic one moment, exaggerated or distorted the next. Text, music and image are set in irrational juxtaposition.

Vocal tone often subverts the meaning of the language - a pornographic fantasy is conveyed in dull monotone, the grim trial of a medieval witch is heard in discordant electronic staccato.

Spoken words are further subverted by contrary phrases and sentences projected on to the stage wall - a woman, for example, describes the prim, confining architecture of her bedroom while the audience reads abandoned, erotic text.

But, despite the inventive anarchy of her work, there are some audience expectations that Kemp in no way defies: the expectations that theatre will be challenging, lucid, compelling and,

The four women performers (Cameron, Eagger, Mills, Schoenheimer) represent four variations of Everywoman and, at the same time, the psychic world of just one woman a turbulent fusion of her reality, her dreams and fantasies, and the myths that have defined her since the beginning of time.

The sole male performer (Minchinton) either paces the periphery of the action, often reading aloud in Italian or French. or plays archetypal male roles within the world of the women.

Kemp layers image on image. exploring and elaborating woman's experience and response to the world, probing the tension between the civilised, repressed life that woman has been conditioned to lead and the wild, untrammelled life of her instinctive being.

Each short scene has its own autonomy. The impact of a later scene may well rely on something that has gone before: but Kemp leaves it to the audience to make the connections.

A mother, for example, directs one of her daughters to cut off her toe and another her heel in a desperate attempt to win Prince Charming. He seems pleased that the slipper fits: but he's repelled by the blood. In following scene, a woman refers cursorily and comically to the violence of clitoridectomy.

This is an impressively coherent production, a vital merging of theatrical elements - script, performances, music (Drake), stage and lighting design (Everitt, Dray).

The landscape of *Call of the Wild* evokes the surreal world of the Belgian painter Paul Delvaux; it manipulates and extends his meanings. It's as if Delvaux's pale, naked women, passive against a background constructed by men have been aroused to question and confront their servitude.

That Kemp's women are partially clothed - they wear skirts and quite elaborate hats - invokes visually her most pervasive theme.

Part of their bodies are modestly decoratively covered as society decrees. But their bare breasts are in harmony with nature, with the free, instinctive world of emotional truth.