

THEATER REVIEW

Courageous ATF offers brilliant theater in 'A Number'

Two-person play confronts ethics, relationship issues

BY CAROL KING

For the Daily Gazette

GLENS FALLS — One of the most difficult aspects of critiquing theater is to offer attentive analysis without giving away the play's secrets.

It is my hope, therefore, gentle reader, to tell you something — but not too much — about the current production of Caryl Churchill's "A Number" being presented by the Adirondack Theatre Festival, and to encourage you most sincerely to see it. It is brilliant theater presented by a courageous company that is not afraid to boldly go where other companies will not venture.

First let me say I am a fan of

'A Number'

WHERE: Adirondack Theatre Festival, Glens Falls

WHEN: Through Saturday

HOW MUCH: \$27

MORE INFO: 798-7479

Churchill. It is easy to dismiss her writing as "not for everybody," as some critics do, or to talk about her artistry as "an acquired taste," like martinis.

FOOD FOR THE SOUL

For me, watching Caryl Churchill is like eating spice cake with raisins. You can identify some of the spices, and the raisins stand out, but there is an overall comfort in her work that often eludes the physical senses and reaches the soul. That is the case with "A Number."

The play is about the ethical and

psychological effects of cloning and, just as important, about the relationships between fathers and sons. All this is compacted into a one-hour, 20-minute one-act play with two characters.

Salter, the father, is strongly played by Robert La Velle. When his only son, Bernard, dies, he has him cloned, but the results are less than perfect. So he has it done again. Unbeknownst to him, the doctors have made not one but 19 copies of the first son. Salter meets three of them.

David Barlow plays the clones with very specific objectives, but his super objective is to please his father. The third clone, Michael, makes this especially clear. This is not one performance by a skilled actor, but three interwoven ones.

MASTERFUL PERFORMANCES

Both La Velle and Barlow handle the essentially domestic confronta-



David Barlow (left) and Robert LaVelle play a father and son with a troubling secret in "A Number" by Caryl Churchill at the Adirondack Theatre Festival.

tions — they always meet in Salter's home — with authority. La Velle is anguished and defensive, while

Barlow is uncertain, confrontational and eager. These are masterful performances.

The actors are shepherded by the careful direction of Sturgis Warner, who seems to have encouraged them to underplay. He offers no scientific elements, only a sequence of dialogues between a father and his son(s).

Lighting design by Ben Stanton serves the play well. As La Velle changes clothing on a dimly lit stage for each meeting with each of his sons, the furniture is rearranged and the shadow of the next son appears backlit on a scrim. A chilling effect like this is what really wonderful theater is all about, calling up feelings of "What is going to happen next?"

Sound by Darron West serves the play with equal finesse and James Wolk's set design is almost invisible. It allows the audience to concentrate on the fine acting. Stage manager Megan Schneid and her crew make tidy work of the set changes.