

Thursday, August 6, 1981

SHOW BUSINESS

STEEL ON STEEL
Westbeth Theatre Center
151 Bank Street • 691-2272

Review by **NANCY JO KLEIN**

opened 7/30/81 seen 7/30/81 closes 8/9/81

STEEL ON STEEL spans six years in the lives of three Italian brothers: Niccolo, Vico, and Bruno Vitelli. This is a family with good intentions but somehow unable to carry them out. Niccolo wants to build up a business with his brothers. Bruno would rather be an artist, and Vico is working on a comedy routine. Jennifer, Niccolo's wife, wants to move out of the family house and have a quiet life alone with her husband. Six years later, none of the goals has been achieved. Bruno is painting and sculpting, but no one is buying his work. Vico's comedy career is a failure. Niccolo and Jenny are still living with the rest of the family, and Niccolo buys out this brothers and goes into business with a competitive firm.

It is not the story, however, but the characters and their relationships that make this play so interesting to watch. Bruno says, "To the world this family shows one sweet stupid face, but to the insider every shade of viciousness." The scenes between the brothers are particularly effective: Brandon Cole and his collaborator John Turturro have captured Italo-American dialect perfectly. The brothers are believable and consistent in their characterizations, but the character of Jennifer is less perfectly drawn; Cole and Turturro do not seem to know if she should be a sympathetic character or not, and so Fran Rizzo has a hard time deciding how to play her.

John Turturro as Niccolo and Matthew Sussman as Bruno are both particularly good, although Turturro should be careful not to lapse into de Niro mannerisms. Michael Badalucco is fine as Vico, and James P. Morgan as Gus, the half-witted janitor, plays a difficult role with care and restraint.

STEEL ON STEEL is well written. The long speeches build nicely (especially Bruno's blood-sucking monologue and the description of the scene in the lawyer's office). The costumes by Quina Francesca show good attention to period detail and enhance the production as do the simple and effective sets by Laurence Maslon. Here too, careful attention to detail is apparent: Mr. Maslon has placed plastic fruit on the table and athletic trophies in Vico's room.

Mr. Maslon has done a fine job directing STEEL ON STEEL. One minor complaint: Jenny gets too gray too fast. Perhaps she should begin act two with the gray streak, or add the gray more gradually. All in all, STEEL ON STEEL provides an interesting and enjoyable evening, and I recommend it.

CREDITS: Westbeth Theatre Center presents *Steel on Steel*, by Brandon Cole in collaboration with John Turturro; director, Laurence Maslon; set design, Laurence Maslon; lights, Todd Thaler; costumes, Quina Francesca; graphics, Janyce Stefan; production assistant, Paul Boyd; music supervision, Matt Sussman. Cast: Michael Badalucco, James P. Morgan, Fran Rizzo, Matthew Sussman, John Turturro

NANCY JO KLEIN has a master's degree from Syracuse University and works in theatre and TV. She has a degree cum laude from McGill University.