



# SHOW BUSINESS

BY ARNE SIERENS  
**MY BLACKIE**

## MY BLACKIE

Written by Arne Sierens  
Presented by Vagabond Productions  
At the Bank Street Theatre  
Review by Kate McGregor

Arne Sierens most recent play, *My Blackie*, explores the truth behind Thomas Wolfe's axiom, "You can never go home again." Although a story that has been told before, Sierens version offers humor juxtaposed with blunt poetic dialogue, providing a refreshing return to a traditional story. Received with great praise throughout England and Europe, Vagabond's production of *My Blackie* at the Bank Street Theatre offers us his play's U.S. debut. With the strong cast and the intimacy of the Bank Street Theatre, Vagabond Productions just may be able to repeat their European counterpart's success.

When Matthew, now a "townie," returns to the small village where he spent much of his formative years, he encounters both old and new faces that receive him with mixed emotions. While his friends exude genuine surprise and excitement to see him it is a new acquaintance whose anger and bitterness at Matthew's intrusion on their peaceful village dominates the play. Filled with real and sincere emotion, *My Blackie* explores a very familiar and somewhat disheartening aspect of the human condition.

After the first few scenes, watching

Matthew, played by Bart Vanlere, individually encounter his old friends, Sylvester, Tom Epstein, and Billy, Stelio Savante, I feared that this might be a painful representation of my own homecoming after moving to New York from a small town. I sensed scene after scene of forced conversation filled with the typical "catching up" quips. However, the introduction of Daniel, played by Bret Mosley, proved that this play has a deeper context. Daniel, the hardworking, sensitive, compassionate loner, whose seriousness and genuine concern about the longevity of their "nice" community, prohibits him from experiencing any real relationships and alienates him from his close friends, provides the momentum of the play. His sincere dialogue, his jealousy of Matthew's relationship with their ex-girlfriend, Mia, and his concern for John-Michael, a dense twenty-something (played by Nick Gomez) who is abused both physically and emotionally throughout the play, reveal the complexities people experience when they attempt to maintain an isolated environment in a burgeoning and intrusive society.

Yes, the foundation of the play seems a little burdensome, but Sierens manages to shake things up and keep the audience intrigued by intoxicating his characters and moving them to a local pub to celebrate Sylvester's birthday. After a few pints, the intensity of the play increases; Mia, played by a nervous Louise Seyffert, reveals her true feelings to Matthew, Daniel's jealousy consumes him, and the dialogue becomes overshadowed by classic rock music. This momentum culminates when John-Michael does a solo to *Rage Against the Machine*, stripping off all his clothes but his underwear.

In the end, the audience is left to draw their own conclusions, a characteristic typical of most of Sierens' plays. The conclusion, therefore, is a play filled with strong performances and an intimate portrait of small town life, proving once again the truth in Wolfe's old adage.