



Shaun Whitley (from left), Alice Wedoff, Adam Kalesperis, Keith D. Gallagher, Kevin Viof and Andy Hager in a scene from "Tracks."

THEATER REVIEW

Troubled, disaffected youth caught in civil war in 'Tracks'

By Kerry Reid
Special to the Tribune

The kids aren't all right. They're drinking and smoking in the park, swearing up a storm and engaging in random acts of cruelty toward the most dimwitted among them.

It could be a scene from any play about disaffected youth — from Edward Bond's "Saved" to Eric Bogosian's "SubUrbia." But the teens in Milena Markovic's "Tracks" have an extra dollop of hardship on top of the usual adolescent traps. They're caught up in the simmering civil war of the former Yugoslavia, and their playground games will soon replicate themselves with horrifying magnification on the battleground.

Markovic, a Belgrade-based playwright, came of age during those dark years. Her play, now in its U.S. premiere by TUTA Theatre Chicago, shares the nightmarish nihilism and scabrous wit of Bond and Bogosian. Those looking for a docudrama about the Balkan war won't find it here. What Markovic provides is a fragmented series of loosely chronological scenes tracing the ef-

"Tracks"

When: Through Oct. 29

Where: Viaduct Theater, 3111 N. Western Ave.

Running time: 1 hour, 25 minutes

Tickets: \$15-\$20 at 847-217-0691

fects of those years on a group of school friends, known only by their descriptive nicknames — Nasty, Cheery, Idiot and Hero (though the latter is far from traditionally heroic in his conduct). There are a few flashes of tenderness and poetry amid the sexual menace and violence, as well as some rousing musical interludes, including "These Boots Are Made for Walking," delivered by Alice Wedoff in a defiant growl.

Wedoff plays all the female roles in the seven-member cast, and hers is a standout performance in a strong ensemble. Whether she's a tough little-girl-lost, a school social worker in over her head with her thuggish male students or a Muslim girl held hostage by Serbian soldiers, Wedoff deftly brings

out the longing, fear and resilience of women who are constantly targeted for abuse and vengeance in the domestic war zone. Among the men in the cast, Andy Hager's aptly named Nasty is chilling in his brutality and Keith D. Gallagher is all sinuous mutability as the equivocal Hero.

Neither Markovic nor director Zeljko Djukich seem interested in anatomizing the psychology of these characters, and that is probably the point. In a deeply chaotic and violent world, the surface attributes are often the only personality traits that register. Yet Djukich's spare approach to the material and his assured cast avoid slipping into cartoonish shorthand.

Despite the lack of backstory for most of the characters, we still find ourselves caught up in what happens to them, and regretting the lost opportunities for them to grow out of the usual adolescent rebellions in a safe and sane world. This is an arresting piece of theater and a rare opportunity to hear a familiar story from an unfamiliar and gifted voice.

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