



## The Element of Fire



Playwright: Sharon Butala  
Director: Sandhano Schultze

Cast:  
Miranda: Pat Armstrong  
Leslie: Ellie Harvey  
Alicia: Celine Lockhart  
Social Worker: Sarah Rodgers

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a review from our archives...

ROCKY PLAY LEAVES CAST HIGH AND DRY

by LLOYD DYKK

*THE ELEMENT OF FIRE*  
Pink Ink/Vancouver Little Theatre  
to Nov. 4, 8:30 p.m.

SASKATCHEWAN writer Sharon Butala's new play *Element of Fire* is for four actresses and it leaves every one of them stranded high and dry. About the only thing to be said for it is that it has good intentions. Well, you assume they must be good, but the play is so unskillfully cobbled together, how can you tell even that much? When people in the audience laugh during a family show-down between a crippled and men-tally defective mother and her delinquent daughter, both of whose lives are in imminent danger from outside, you can be pretty sure that good intentions aren't counting for much.

Miranda, a handicapped mother (played by Pat Armstrong) in a special home, is visited by her daughter Leslie for the first time in a year. It's pretty clear that Leslie (Ellie Harvey) is hooking and even clearer why. Miranda used to lead quite a life herself, according to the hostile Leslie, who can't bring up enough times how Miranda, stoned one night with another one of her low-life boyfriends, let the house burn down.

"You were a lousy mother. Who wants a freak for a mother?" spits Ellie at the wheel-chair-bound woman, just before deciding to get friendly and bunk up for the night. Some-where out there, her boyfriend is gunning for her. You know he's bad news because his name is Rocky.

Ellie and her mom, who though she's supposed to be mentally handicapped doesn't at all seem it, wrangle endlessly. Alicia, Miranda's priggish sister (Celine Lockhart), makes a few entrances just to stir things up and drop howlers like "Rocky? Did you say Rocky?! He's a drug dealer! He's the scum of the earth!" How does this proper matron know a guy called Rocky? And why is she telling us what we already know? The play goes on and on repeating information like that and still not getting clearer.

Who are these people? Why is the social worker (Sarah Rodgers - a good actress wasted) suddenly behind a scrim telling us things that don't even add up in the chronology? Just when you think a character is finally off the stage, there she is again behind the scrim - the equivalent of someone's head poking through the window.

The program credits Sandhano Scultze with direction but there's no help there. The characters will be going in one direction and suddenly, with no transition, flaring up and lashing out. With no sense of anyone's reality, there's not much hope of Butala's points coming across about accepting adversity. Any soap opera says as much, and as convincingly.

Assistant Director: Donna Mailey

Stage Manager: Kate Laidlaw

Set Designer: Susan Madsen

Light Designer: Linda Beech

Costume Designer: Carla Krogan

Sound Designer: Frank Griffiths

Photographer: Stephen Mitchell

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