



Face the Truth:
Basil takes a glimpse under
 the mask of manhood.

recorded sound: One key scene, in which Basil must win back his mutinous men, is a dialogue between Schoen and a noisy, stagy recording of braying “troops” who fall unnaturally silent when it’s their commander’s turn to deliver a line. But even that awkward passage doesn’t sink this tale of a man undone less by the caprice of a woman than by the self-perceived failure to be a man when the situation demands one.

—**Pamela Murray Winters**

Count Basil

By Joanna Baillie

Directed by Leslie Jacobson

At Theater on the Run to June 29

One of the most compelling dramatic explorations of manhood now playing locally was written by a woman. Joanna Baillie published *Count Basil* anonymously in 1798; admired on the page, it was never performed until the Horizons Theatre gave it its world premiere last week. *Count Basil* offers enough dramatic subtext and historical insight to busy a gender-studies class for a whole semester, and Horizons ups the post-show-discussion ante by cast-

ing women in several of the male roles. All of which is fascinating—but would be hardly worth a penny if the play were a mere historical curio. Fortunately, *Count Basil* is a lively, moving script, and it’s performed wholeheartedly by a team of solid performers. Eric Schoen plays the titular hero more as lover than fighter; we hear of his battle prowess, but we see him as a young man torn between war-making and skirt-chasing after one glimpse of the Duke of Mantua’s daughter. That daughter, Victoria (Jessica Cerullo), is a flirty, spoiled princess who scarcely seems worthy of Basil’s adoration, as noted by his scornful pal Rosinberg (Colby Cod-

ding). Rosinberg is given many of the script’s tart observations about the playwright’s sex; he notes that “every woman has some ‘witching charm.’” Later, he succumbs to such artifice at a masquerade ball, where Victoria’s governess, Albin (Caren Anton), messes with his head in a delicious monologue detailing feminine moods and wiles, then convinces him she’s the very sort of sweet young thing she’s warned him about. The play is a tragedy, but with more lightness than the Montague/Capulet variety, and with brief pantomime dances and an eerie song sung by a child dressed as an angel, it has a midsummer night’s charm. It falters only when it relies on