

NEW YORK  
**The Sun**

T H E A T E R

# Women, Interrupted

By HELEN SHAW

In Ann Randolph's sneaky one-woman show "Squeeze Box," choices that shouldn't work somehow do. Deeply unfunny subjects like women's shelters and paranoid schizophrenics prove hilarious. Personal disclosures that should seem trite suddenly take on generous proportions. And her bare-bones, nearly anti-theatrical presentation stealthily makes a case for art as the whole person's guide and companion.

In an ingratiatingly folksy tone, Ms. Randolph tells us the story of her recent career crisis, stuck for 10 years working the graveyard shift at a women's shelter in Los Angeles. Feeling permanently atrophied, exploding

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## SQUEEZE BOX

*Acorn Theater*

## ANTIGONE

*National Asian-American Theatre Company*

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with the need for a more beautiful life, she takes on an accordionist lover, pops a classical CD in the stereo, and quits her job — only to discover how illusory change can be. Ms. Randolph, while describing her impoverished life, seems almost accidentally to discover its richness — in music, in natural beauty, and in service.

Ms. Randolph trained with the Groundlings, breeding ground for countless Saturday Night Live comics. Her sensibility, though clearly influenced by the character-heavy skits of her past, is both more passionate and more respectful than we might expect from a "sketch" artist. She may have

the stretchy face of a clown, but she has a heart like a house. Whether portraying her flakey spiritualist friend Shoshanna (It "*changed my life*" she says of a leper colony and "Seabiscuit" alike) or the hard-as-nails hooker Brandy, Ms. Randolph doesn't assault us with her characters. Instead she tickles us with their foibles. She doesn't "make fun"; she sees the humor of her own situation.

This shouldn't imply that Ms. Randolph is shy. No, we hear about sexual exploits with her accordion-tickling Prince Charming in queasy detail (outdoor nooky has never seemed so grody), and the aforementioned Brandy has a mouth like an infected sailor. The world of shelters and asylums hasn't got a lot of time for prudery, and neither does Ms. Randolph. But she seems so jolly and accepting about it all, so willing to put the slightly spastic next to the borderline catatonic (because he "could probably use a little whack every now and then") that you roll with her.

Such warmth and frankness are in short supply in the theater, so go and bask while you can. Her piece has been optioned for film rights, and this off-Broadway run may catapult her to bigger and better places. If you go now, you get a bargain. You want to see her *after* she's a star? That, as Brandy would say, will cost extra.

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