

AUTUMN CANTICLE ***3/4

(Play by John W. Lowell (1997); Directed by David Ogden Stiers) The Walnut Street Studio Theatre has added another feather to its cap with the world premiere of *Autumn Canticle*, a sensitive portrayal of two musical artists, who have shared each other's art and bed for some thirty years. This, however, is not a play about homosexuality. Rather it is about the struggles of a life together as age and infirmity take its toll on talent, creativity, and the body. What makes this play so powerful is the genuine characters created by playwright John W. Lowell. They are playful, but they are also extremely bright men who may occasionally play games but don't know the definition of stereotype. As a result, *Autumn Canticle* is a play about any two people who have shared the joys and the pains of a long term relationship. The taking stock of the situation is triggered by the entrance of Walker (Callum Keith-King) writing his thesis on Williams (William M. Whitehead) and Billings (William McCauley). He assists while Williams while his friend is in the hospital and helps Billings in creating an autobiography. The result is the unleashing of the passions the two men have felt for each other and for their art. It also reveals the inevitable changes that time effected upon each. It asks questions about commitment, honesty, and selfishness. Under the skillful direction of David Ogden Stiers, Whitehead, McCauley, and Keith-King all give exceptional dramatic performances while avoiding the overdramatic. It's a real gem.

====CAST: William M. Whitehead, William McCauley, Callum Keith-King

====Set: Thom Bumblauskas; Lighting: Troy Martin-O'Shia; Sound: Bill Rathbone (T-Sat 8, Sat & Sun 2, Sun 7, 2 hrs 20 min, \$15-\$25)(Walnut Street Studio 3, Ninth and Walnut Sts., Phila., PA 19107, 215-574-3550,ext.4) To Mar. 9, 1997.