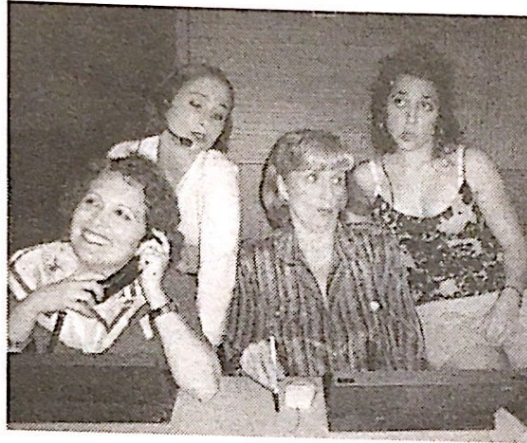


Stage

STAGEBEAT



The four secretaries who are the characters in *Hold Please*, the Women's Theatre Project's current comedy, work in drearily uninspiring confines. We see their paltry break room and its minifridge, their small desks littered with stuffed animals and figurines. We see them hoard half-and-half and steal one another's Nutter Butters. We see them carry out tasks such as ordering Mont Blanc pens, fetching coffee, and answering the phone all day with one word: "SolomanXavierSanbornSachs." But don't think these women are powerless. The story opens with the punishment of one of the male partners by way of the sexual harassment policy. The charges are bogus, orchestrated by one of our four secretaries, but the man is fired anyway. *Hold Please* is a wicked delight not because of its post-feminist observations but because playwright Annie Weisman provides a deliciously dark caricature of the workplace. The four women make big speeches about fairness and respect, but they understand little of what they're saying. Their cluelessness is where the fun comes in. Anybody who has worked in an office will revel in the pettiness and backstabbing. We know these characters. They antagonize one another, but at the same time, they seem to love to hate one another. Watching it all play out is the play's joy. The challenge for director Genie Croft and the four players is in the comic timing that is this play's lifeblood. Mostly, the cast nails it; the rest of the time, it's close enough. One flaw in the script is that the exaggerated characters can't find their footing for some of the serious, softer moments. The temptation must have been to tone down the over-the-top characters. But the performers let it rip and go for the laughs. Good choice. (Through June 26 at the Studio, 640 N. Andrews Ave., Fort Lauderdale. Call 954-462-2334.) — **Jason Cottrell**