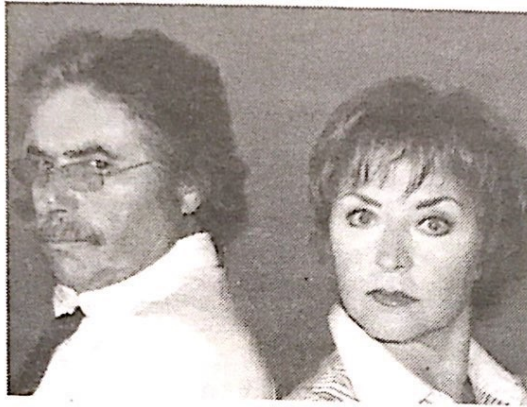


Stage

STAGEBEAT



In the era of *American Idol* and *Fear Factor*, TV watchers have never before been privy to such a smorgasbord of other people's humiliations and vulnerabilities. Playwright Jim Tommaney offers a suggestion for raising the bar even farther. His satirical comedy ***Reality TV***, now at EDGE Theatre, tells the story of two callous programming executives pitching their next great idea: a reality show that culminates in an on-air suicide. Watching them sell suicide is funny. It's a "springboard to eternity." People don't die, they're "released!" The hucksters have run the numbers too – lots of people contemplate and attempt suicide; many more are depressed and will tune in. Likely sponsors include insurance companies. The jabs here are humorous, but the targets – media and advertising – are easy. In the first half hour, we learn what we already suspected: These people have no souls. The play is much more about the business of increasing viewership and how far the media have sunk than about its characters. Media satire is a good starting place, but we still need to understand and care about the players. Sure, Tommaney's two bootlicking backstabbers are self-serving, empty shells, but how did they get that way? Do they have any limits or doubts? *Reality TV* is merely a predictable inside look at the perverse world of network television. And in the end, Tommaney lets the media off the hook, when the suicide concept – which was working – is inexplicably set aside for a few surprising-but-uninteresting plot twists and some commentary on media conglomeration. Why not explore the suicide show further? What we really want to know is: In this race to the bottom, what is won or lost? (Through May 22 at EDGE Theatre, Main Street Playhouse, 6766 Main St., Miami Lakes. Call 954-733-8735.) — **Jason Cottrell**