

# All over, bar the shouting

TWO PLAYS, one writer, three women and a hell of a lot of screaming. Steven Froelich, from Chicago's Steppenwolf studios, is spreading his acid-tongued talents over two theatres simultaneously during this year's Fringe.

At the Pleasance Dome, a plane takes off for *Weekend in Rio* while, at the Pleasance Over the Road, Froelich doubles up as writer/actor in his one-man (playing three ladies) show, *It Woulda Been Nice*. And the latter features the three leading ladies from the former. Confused? You will be.

As a rule of thumb, ranting, hysteria and in-flight entertainment music should sound alarm bells in the theatre, but in these two plays it is the stuff that binds the delicious white-trash operatics. *Weekend in Rio*, ingeniously staged with the audience as passengers seated either side of a catwalk-style aisle, tells the tale of Sugar, a middle-aged mother-from-hell as she jets off after her thieving teenage son Chester.

Chester, in the company of two constantly bitching friends, Tina and Jenny, has absconded with cash from the family business, but the plot is more or less irrelevant; it is merely



## THEATRE WEEKEND IN RIO / IT WOULDA BEEN NICE PLEASANCE DOME / OVER THE ROAD

a platform for what is essentially a series of mad-woman-in-the-attic monologues.

Both plays are self-contained pieces although *It Woulda Been Nice* allows the three principal characters to evolve into a surreal platform that make more sense if you've seen *Rio* first. But it's Froelich's extreme take on his characters that makes this absurd one-hander work. Performing from inside a black box, Froelich exposes only his fast-talking head, lit from above by a disc ball, and the effect is as unnerving as it is funny.

No woman I know speaks like this, in spleen-and-uterus-venting sentences with flourishes that demand a feather boa in one hand and a dagger in the other. It's as though Woody Allen had devised a script for Jerry Springer. There is much talk of bludgeoning people's brains alongside neurotic Martha Stewart-style com-



An eye-opener: 'A Weekend in Rio' Gerant Lewis

ments about recipes and interior décor. In both plays, we are party to hysterical women - as created by a hysterical man.

If his theatrical modus operandi is anything to go by then Froelich is a keen green player; he loves nothing more than to recycle his material, importing characters from one play to the next (*Weekend in Rio* features characters from his very first play *They Offered Bob and Wilma Cash*).

Short on words he's not, but perhaps a little short on material? These plays are without doubt a success but maybe now is the time to move on from the oestrogen-rage genre, before someone gets hurt.

SARAH BARRELL

'Weekend in Rio', Venue 23, (0131-556 6550) to 27 Aug, 16.30 (17.50); 'It Woulda Been Nice', Venue 33, (0131-556 6550), to 27 Aug (not 20 or 23) 16.30 (17.30)