

FRANKIE + JOHNNY
IN THE CLAIR DE
LUNE, 1994

One night stand

BEHIND the teasing title of Terence McNally's *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* is a schmaltzy two-hander which enjoyed unexpected success on stage and screen. Last week it was briefly revived at Hampton Court Theatre, a TTC studio production given a realistic New York apartment setting designed by Jean Goodwin.

Clair de Lune is not a place but the piano classic, played as a request on a small-hours radio show. And this is not a dramatisation of the ballad, although director Rick de Kerckhove used the Presley recording as a curtain-raiser, leading into orgasmic sounds from a double-bed as the play opens in a darkened room.

Clare Terry's Frankie, a New York waitress and wannabe actress, and David Hannigan as Johnny the short-order cook, are sharing a one-night stand in her West 50s apartment. Between the embraces and exchanges of confidences they banter and prepare food.

Bruised by life she treasures her solitude and independence, while enjoying a casual night of sex. He wants a long-term relationship, spouting

Shakespeare to disarm her, hoping sex can lead to love. But finally his 'performing dog' fails to rise to the occasion.

Thinly plotted, the comedy depends heavily on its two performers: in this case attractively younger than the used-up people of the story; and with a stage chemistry that makes you feel the play may end happily ever after as the couple brush their teeth in unison while swaying to Debussy.

Ms Terry, with a clear and convincing New York accent, bravely appeared unclothed in the opening moments and was good at conveying Frankie's vulnerability beyond the veneer of good humoured diffidence.

It seems only yesterday that Hannigan was playing juvenile roles with Youth Action Theatre. Here, with an accent like a battle-fatigued Hawkeye (but not always easy to follow), he gave depth and warmth to his role as the thirty-something jailbird; chopping ham with a deft wrist action, neatly breaking eggs, but fumbling over the garlic cloves for his Western sandwich preparations.

The evening was warmly received by an impressively full house.

John Thaxter