

Theatre: 'Blue Denim'



Burt Brinckerhoff and Carol Lynley in "Blue Denim"

By **BROOKS ATKINSON**

BY ADHERING to the bald facts of a poignant situation, James Leo Herlihy and William Noble have written a moving play.

In honor of the adolescents who dominate it, they call it "Blue Denim," beautifully staged and acted at the Playhouse last evening. But don't be misled by the amiable homeliness of the title. For this is the drama of some artless adolescents who blunder into big trouble and cannot communicate about it with their parents. The young and the old love and respect each other. When the crises are great ones, they cannot go to one another for help.

The trouble is ghastly. Arthur Bartley, a likable and generally responsible lad, gets his girl friend, Janet, into trouble. Both are the children of affectionate parents. But neither one dares to confide in the adults. In a state of panic, Arthur forges a check in his father's name to pay for an abortion.

If this sounds like familiar juvenile delinquency, it creates a false impression. For the authors of "Blue Denim" have drawn attractive characters for the young as well as the old. And the basic theme is not the terrible consequences of a love affair but the awful barriers that divide parents and children. They need one another. They try desperately to reach one another. But the distance is too great. They cannot talk until the most harrowing part of the trouble has ended.

As a piece of playwriting, "Blue Denim" is almost as inarticulate as its characters. It needs richer writing than the authors have brought to it. They have not dominated it like writers with words and phrases that evoke mood and express pity and compassion. "Blue Denim" is so sparing that it is more like the outline of a clinical study than a fully resolved drama. It seems to be a point of honor on the part of the authors not to participate in their drama.

But the relationships between the characters and the situation in general are so illuminating and distressing that the play wins on its own

The Cast

BLUE DENIM, a play in three acts, by James Leo Herlihy and William Noble. Staged by Joshua Logan; presented by Barbara Wolferman and James Hammerstein; setting by Peter Larkin; lighting by Charles Elson; costumes by Alvin Colt; production stage manager, Howard Whitfield. At the Playhouse.

Arthur Bartley.....	Burt Brinckerhoff
Major Bartley.....	Chester Morris
Lillian Bartley.....	Pat Stanley
Jessie Bartley.....	June Walker
Ernie Lacey.....	Warren Berlinger
Janet Willard.....	Carol Lynley

terms in the last act. The contrast between the sincere and forbearing parents in the living room and the wondering, unworldly adolescents trying to live a secret life in the basement; the tenderness between the lovers; the terrified loyalty of Arthur's buddy; the moments of silent anxiety; the difference between the humdrum lives of the parents and the tense lives of the adolescents—all those things are expressed tersely and are painfully enlightening.