

# The Washington Post Weekend

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Gross National Product: keeping you grinning from year to year.

## Sho' 'Nuff, It's 'The Right Fluff'

BY LLOYD GROVE

Gross National Product, a Washington-oriented comedy troupe, has tossed something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue into "The Right Fluff," its satirical revue at D.C. Space. And while one or two of their routines play woodenly, GNP's five performers are clever enough elsewhere to keep most folks grinning, and regularly laughing.

From the new material, there's "The One (and only) Official Soviet Socialist Musical," complete with steamy romance and slippery intrigue, in which a team of Russian scientists sings and dances its way to the development of a particle-beam weapon. And there's "A Caucus Line," with Messrs. Hart, Mondale and Glenn singing "I Really Need This Job" against the commanding counterpoint of an imperious casting director. The luckless Glenn, in his outsized space helmet, evokes nothing so much as Colonel Bleep.

From the stuff we've seen before, there's a lampoon of tacky tourists at Walt Dismal World, and a generic cocktail party at which the guests come right out with their deepest feelings ("throbbing caucasian passion!") instead of the usual chitchat. Less amusing is another look at crass TV evangelists (how can you improve on the real thing?), though even this is enlivened by a religious Richard Simmons, whose "exorcise show" promises to make viewers "light enough to walk on water."

The portly James Bowling, who plays Simmons with fey zealotry, is the most virtuosic of these generally accomplished clowns. Just when the show starts to drag, Bowling barges in as a lizardly lounge singer, or a roly-poly break dancer or a Bolshoi diva — and saves the day.

THE RIGHT FLUFF — At D.C. Space through March 31.

## Gross Fun With 'GNP'

BY LLOYD GROVE

Even when they go to wretched excess, the Video Buddies don't lose their appeal. And with their satirical revue "Gross National Product," at Columbia Station's cabaret, they prove they know what makes for an evening's entertainment.

The manic five-member troupe, directed by Washington native John Simmons (who also writes much of the material), is in the tradition of Chicago's Second City and San Francisco's Company. That is, they draw from their surroundings — in this case, the Federal City — and aim between the eyes, sometimes with a sledgehammer.

An ambitious sketch titled "Alex in Washington," the centerpiece of the show, offers so many biting and zany conceits that you hardly mind the sophomoric and preachy ones. Alex (not Haig), an underling at the Bechtel Corp., comes to town as an innocent, only to be shocked and dismayed by the dark secrets of Washington parties, the Smithsonian, the Pentagon, Congress and the White House.

Highlights are Simmons as James Watt, "The Mad Flattener" — stalking around stage in hardhat, with a dangerous gleam in his eye — and Joel Perry as a conservative Southern orator who can't help but declaim like a chicken.

Of the other sketches, more than a few travel well-trod ground — "Beat The Press" (world affairs in a game-show format), "The PTL" (crass evangelists) and "The Descent of Man" (yet another PBS parody, replete with an Alistair Cooke character) — but almost always, they bring along some unexpected pleasure.

GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT — Video Buddies, at Columbia Station through August 14. 342-1387.

AUGUST 10, 1984

## PERFORMANCE

## 'Terms of Endorsement': Making Fun of the News

The flexible and extremely likable comedy troupe Gross National Product is back in town with "Terms of Endorsement," a zippy set of topical sketches at D.C. Space.

Particular standouts are the hyperactive James Bowling and John Simmons, whose bag of tricks includes a startlingly effective Reagan and a wonderfully unctuous talk-show host demeanor.

Absorbing its inspiration from television, movies and pop-culture effluvia, the GNP troupe is quick on the uptake with news trends. Expect the show to evolve as news is committed. The current edition includes a wicked Miss America spoof; a glimpse of Mondale and Ferraro making commercials aimed at Latin

American, black and Yuppie markets; a stab at television "magazine" shows; and an Olympic parody that cleverly confuses brand names with names of the Olympian gods.

But the funniest, and weirdest, moments occur when GNP breaks out of the Saturday Night Live/S-CTV mold and creates some inspired original nonsense. A good example is "Carp of Death," a bizarre impression of a badly dubbed Japanese horror flick, which makes good use of voice-overs, lighting effects and taped sounds to expand the images without benefit of sets.

— JOE BROWN.

TERMS OF ENDORSEMENT — Friday and Saturday at D.C. Space through September 29.