



# LA Theatre Review

Presents



## The HollywoodFRINGE Daily Rag

Day Eight

Thursday, June 24, 2010

### **THE PACKER at Theatre of NOTE**

by Vince Duvall~

Hollywood Fringe is full of many one person plays– or I should say solo artist shows – I forget what they wanna be called now. In fact many fringe festivals carry a healthy percent of these types of shows because they go up easy, come down quick and travel light. I'm always looking for a little something extra than just an actor showcasing – which I can see any day of the year here in Hollywood. A straight from the heart story of my life (Brownsville Bred), a tour de force in movement and mime (Kill Your Television) and then there's the character driven one man story – like The Packer told by Jay Ryan. I wasn't asked to review this New Zealand entry but I happened by the Theatre of NOTE early and decided to see what kind of life urban West Auckland was packing.

To say that Ryan's performance 'transcends location ' and offers insight into the growing cultural and contemporary affects of urban life doesn't go far enough. Like a precision factory machine, Ryan pops in and out of the alcoholic - hot chick- Pacific Niuean -slow motion transvestite chasing- drug fueled characters that populate the world, and are bookended in a single thought, of Shane, a warehouse packer. Inspired gestures tell you everything you need to know in a millisecond - for a solid sixty minutes of rare commitment. Like a young Berkoff (but, you know, from NZ).

Mixing the dark and sometimes scary elements of urban life, which might be too edgy for kids and perhaps those in law enforcement, the character work by Ryan is definitely worth the sit.

THE PACKER shows 24<sup>th</sup>-10pm, 26<sup>th</sup>-6.30, 27<sup>th</sup>-2pm at the Theatre of NOTE on Cahuenga.

### **Lost Moon Radio at Theatre of Arts**

by Freddy Puza~

Artists, activists, historians, social scientists, business people and government leaders have all had a hand at trying to tell the story of America. And now, DJ Jupiter Jack and the cast and musicians of *Lost Moon Radio* put their spin on the ever-evolving American story.

DJ Jupiter Jack's 4th of July show is put up against the corporate version, Fart of July, which is nothing more than mindless humor which attracts lots of money for the station. A young listener's call challenges DJ Jack into choosing idealism or being practical. All the while, DJ Jack broadcasts his stories about American history from the Lewis & Clark expedition to women's liberation and the Gettysburg address.

The show has heart through and through. It's an elaborate work from

writers, actors and musicians who put thought into the script. Behind the skits, the songs and the humor, the show offers the audience a takeaway, hope. Hope for the arts, hope for humanity, hope that we all won't sell out to the highest bidder. Each joke seems to be carefully crafted with this message in mind.

The performers were buried behind a wall of microphones and decorations. It would have served them well to break free from that. The one-hour long show clips along at a nice pace and leaves you wanting DJ Jack to continue transmitting his broadcasts from that "lost moon of Jupiter."

*Lost Moon Radio* plays June 24 at 8 p.m., June 25 at 11 p.m. and June 26 at 4 p.m.

### **Eenie Meanie at Open Fist Theatre**

by K. Primeau~

Teresa Willis' brave romp through the past four decades of American racial relations is at once deeply personal and resoundingly universal, the choice fodder for a pitch-perfect solo performance. Amidst a backdrop of Barbies and roller skates, pop music and family home videos, the audience witnesses as a five-year old white girl from Valley Station, Kentucky, in 1965 begins her fascination with people of color, awakening her empathic intuition in the midst of the American Civil Rights Movement. Infinitely playful, her tempered performance carefully etches other milestones along her life to her present, Post-Obama election (and therefore, arguably, "Post-Racist") self. Between busses to her newly de-segregated high school and near-curfew strolls during the LA Riots, Willis falls in love with a black woman, questions her Crayolas, witnesses violence against her friends, and confronts her parents' bigotry. Neither hero nor victim, her honest and at times hilariously shameless journey investigates many nuanced perspectives on racism, fear, guilt, love and solidarity, avoiding any simplified resolution in favor of studied introspection. Having toured and performed the show extensively, production values are high, with beautiful use of Open Fist's space by the entire design team. Elizabeth Swenson and Martha Demson's direction, with careful movement work and inventive staging, keeps the energy bright even as Willis delves into more serious subject matter. Bravo to Open Fist and Say Tiger Productions for taking a great story and making an exemplary piece of one-person theatre!

*Eenie Meanie* plays one more time at the Fringe, June 17 @ 4PM at Open Fist Theatre.

**Los Angelyne @ Theatre Asylum**

by K. Primeau ~

Having seen a previous incarnation of this piece at REDCAT's Winter Studio in 2009, I was pleasantly surprised to see Katherine Saltzberg more at home in her humble tale of fame and family disconnect at Theatre Asylum. Angelyne, in case you suspected, is indeed the busty blonde who painted her image across Hollywood billboards throughout the 80's, a self-made sex icon "with a Betty Boop voice." Saltzberg, in simple dress with even simpler projections, explains how her embarrassment at her father's connection to Angelyne loomed over her young adulthood like a great big, well, billboard-sized rack of fake tits. Poking fun at herself and her own ambitions of grandeur as an actress in LA, Saltzberg uses industry in-jokes and confrontations at grocery stores to elicit a steady peel of laughter over her self-mortification and desperate attempt to connect with her father. Altogether underwhelming, the frank and earnest story flutters forward without a dramatic build or sufficient theatrical construct to raise it above pedestrian heights. While it's easy to root for the cute former-child star, her disengaging mannerisms keep her as distanced from the audience as she was with her father. We laugh, we are "perturbed," but when the heavy moments are supposed to hit, they just fly on unremembered, like a pink corvette in traffic, or yesterday's celebrity news.

One performance remains - June 26 @ 4 PM at Theatre Asylum

**Back to Babylon at Theatre of NOTE**

by Geoff Hoff~

Donny is a corrections officer living in the town of Babylon on Long Island. He enters his favorite bar after work on the Friday before his ten year high school reunion. This brings him back to the Seventies and all the people he knew back then.

Gregg Tomé, who also wrote and directed, is a very technically accomplished artist. He has been developing and traveling the country with this show since 1997. He convincingly plays nine separate characters, Donny's friends and a few of the adults of the town from his high school years. Each character is presented as an extended monologue. Some of the monologues, however, seem too long. We understand them and their place well before they move on. The monologues are all (or at least most of them are) leading to something, but we don't know that until that something has passed and we are back in the present day bar.

The changes in character are made with costume changes offstage while we watch a photograph projected against the back wall in quick transitions between close up and full, accompanied by music. The sound and visuals were created by Kenneth Greenbaum. Even with this, having Mr. Tomé go offstage between each monologue makes the piece drag more than it might.

The best of Tomé's characterizations is an old man who sits on a porch watching the kids go back and forth and sees more than he is meant to. He doesn't seem to have much to do with the story, however. Most of the adults don't, really, although they are all interesting in themselves. The next best is the young athlete, the only black man in town, who excels but has his own agenda.

Remaining performances: June 25, 6:00 pm - June 26, 11:00 am - Theatre of NOTE.

**For the Special Ones at the Stella Adler Theatre**

by Ashley Steed-

I'm going to be honest – I'm not really sure what Mikhail Tank's solo show is, let alone what it's about. Part word collage, part story, part music, part interpretive movement, part self help guru, part arts advocacy – it's too many parts that don't make up a whole. The original music by Daniel Levin is promising. In fact, I think I would have preferred a concert with Tank interjecting his thoughts on creativity and the importance of art.

The pace was too slow, the transitions were too slow and I was distracted by a woman in the audience taking pictures, as well as his amazing-technicolor-dreamcoat. There were, however a couple of poignant moments. One of which, he speaks of Leonardo da Vinci, who was dyslexic and compared him to the Ritalin-popping ADD kids of today – would we still have the Mona Lisa? Anyone who champions for the arts instantly earns my respect, *For the Special Ones*, however is too convoluted to get the message across. Thankfully, the piece is short.

This was the only performance.

**Basic Training at the Comedysportz Theatre**

by Rachel Jenkins ~

A one-man show based on the true life experiences of performer Kahlil Ashanti begins as he leaves his mother & father for basic training. As he is about to depart, a family secret is revealed to him that affects his journey & the rest of his life. Kahlil masterfully moves between characters with such grace, simplicity & specificity it is like watching a cast of 23. From basic training into the Air Force entertainment troupe Tops in Blue through his tour and home again, Kahlil introduces a plethora of characters & situations you can't take your eyes off. An amazing connection with the audience pulled us in & kept us there as the audience couldn't help but feel everything that he did. It is non-stop laughter until true emotion begins to hit as Kahlil meets a young girl who forces him to pursue the truth behind his family secret. Perfect comedic timing accompanied by an amazing true story, witty writing & strong direction makes this an experience you've got to have. As Kahlil ends his tour his drill sergeant states, barks "if it gets any sappier in here I'm going to sprout tits." But, with Kahlil's authentic & inspired performance that provides insight into a world rarely shared, you really can't help but get a little sappy.

*Basic Training* plays June 24 & 25 at 7pm and June 26 at 3pm.

**State of Theatre in LA: Critic's Panel Discussion**

LATR invites you to join us for a FREE closing day panel discussion with fellow critics from the LA Theatre scene. Panel begins at 1pm at Fringe Central on June 27th. For more info go to the Hollywood Fringe site - hope to see you there!