



LA Theatre Review

Presents



The HollywoodFRINGE Daily Rag

Day Eleven

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We've enjoyed covering Hollywood Fringe. See you next year!

***The Waste Land* at Theatre Asylum**

by K. Primeau~

T.S. Eliot's poem on wandering the streets of London contains dissonant imagery of drought and despondency that could easily be descriptive of strolls along the LA River and barren, concrete-rock walls of Hollywood. In Filament Theatre Co.'s staged performance of the piece, five chorus members bring new life to the fragmented journey, applying props and movement with an ingenuity that uplifts the text and illuminates Eliot's nervous temperament. Alluding to the hand drums and stark delivery of spoken-word poetry, but never falling into cliché, the production's soundscape creates music from objects and is upheld by the rich voices of all of the players. Fortright and funny, the clever staging avoids reverence while still applying depth to the weighty text, a testament to director Hilario Saavedra's talent and grace. Modernist poetry meets contemporary theatre, it is a unique and sparsely beautiful contribution to the multifarious fringe community.

***Den of Thieves* at the Lex Theatre**

by Robert Axelrod~

Den of Thieves, by Stephen Adly Guirguis, offers us an excellent premise in a fast, well paced Act I, only to slow to a near crawl in Act II while that premise is paid off in an unexpected way. Once the play finally rounds up, it's results are contrived but pleasant anyway.

Maggie and Paul are two former thieves trying to go straight in a 12 step recovery program called Recovery Thieves Program. Paul is a master at 12 step, having gone through overeating and smoking and has 692 days without a crime. Maggie is his newest sponsee, and has just slipped by shoplifting a supermarket. There's a lot of very clever repartee between the two, as Paul tries to set Maggie straight. In comes Flacco, Maggie's ex-boyfriend, with current squeeze Boochie in tow and a full-proof scheme to rob a safe above a local night club. Paul and Maggie both relapse and go with the plan.

Act II deals with not the robbery, but after they are caught, and waxes philosophical. Both the perps and their captors, the local mob, get to shine in the light of monologue and character motivation.

Den of Thieves plays at The Lex Theatre, 6760 Lexington Avenue, Hollywood, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 PM, Sundays at 3 PM, now through July 11th. Dark July 4th weekend

***Happy Birthday, Mom* at the Dorie Theatre at The Complex**

by Joel Elkins~

It's a good thing *Happy Birthday, Mom* isn't a thriller, because

the plot is divulged on the program cover: "Olivia flies home to surprise her Mom on her 55th birthday only to find her clad in leather waiting for a young man off craigslist to come over for sex."

It would have been nice had they held back some of those nuggets for the audience to discover on their own, but let's not quibble. *Happy Birthday* is still wonderfully enjoyable by virtue of the smart dialogue of writer/producer/director Meghan Gambling and terrific acting by a talented cast. Gambling the writer avoids the pitfall of trying to be too clever and simply writes the way real people would speak when placed in an incredibly awkward situation. She then entrusts the script to the capable hands of Gambling the director to bring it to life with brilliantly subtle execution. Michelle Glavan is especially realistic as Olivia, as is John Roderick Davidson as the ultra-suave Thorn.

Happy Birthday, Mom plays June 19, 26, 27 at 1:00 p.m., June 20, 27 at 9:30 p.m., June 23 at 8:00 p.m. and June 25 at 4:00 p.m.

***Can You Hear Me Now* at Hudson Theatres**

by Tatyana Gelfond~

Can You Hear Me Now, a solo play by Phoebe Neidhardt is fifty-five minutes in length, and manages to pack in a multitude of different characters waiting for their turn at the Los Angeles DMV. Hecticness, Neidhardt first enters the stage as an out of work actress who describes herself as an emotional overeater, disconnected from the people around her. "The naïve see each other, we don't," says Neidhardt after dropping real coffee on stage, and pulling two napkins out of her bra to wipe up the mess-- it's nice to see a real comedian from time to time.

Neidhardt's DMV starts to resemble Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, through ludicrous characters trapped together, yet isolated, through lack of interaction, waiting for hours for something simple as a license renewal.

These aren't just caricatures, this is elastic surrealism, especially with the character of the Sudanese DMV employee, who handles stressful situations by parroting back whatever complaint is vomited in her direction.

The audience cackles with delight, as Kip, the DMV photographer, and double-dipper of the DMV's camera equipment "I take my own headshots here at the DMV" goes into a musical number. Neidhardt quickly produces a portfolio of headshots. "Death...a great leveler." Neidhardt quotes Mark Twain, as human connection is finally achieved as crisis strikes the DMV.

***Taxi Stories* at ComedySportz L.A.**

by Sylvia Blush ~

David O'Shea, playwright and storyteller, puts the wheels in motion on this charming one man show about his adventures as a taxi driver in New York. A music stand sits to his right and becomes both

the dashboard and conductor as each story unfolds. Upon the stand sits his text, laid out for a quick reminder of what comes next, but they disappear as O'Shea's voice wraps around you like a warm summer night through the humbling streets of the big apple. Downstage left is a broken taxi meter which he demonstrates how to turn it on as the first tale begins.

Taxi Stories is more than a recount of O'Shea's seven years as a caddy. It's a transformation of a wide-eyed Ohio native turned into a street smart transplant. His journey includes the usual suspects of cab driver woes, (bad tippers, traffic, long hours, traffic, no breaks, traffic, etc.), but they grow secondary as we learn about customers like the one who paid him with a fish and dollar bill or the young hooker who was in love for the first time. Story after story and about ten characters later, O'Shea had us laughing and near tears. If you closed your eyes you could almost hear the sounds of New York streets and the rushing of the people whizzing by day after day.

My only quibble would be wanting a little more polished continuity within the stories and the heat in the venue. Regardless of that, I was in for the ride.

Taxi Stories may have a possible run after the Fringe at ComedySportz L.A.

The Fuxedos, plus Fish Circus at Paul G. Gleason Theatre

by Andrew Moore~

Fish Circus opens the evening with an energetic and kinetic set of dark cabaret endowed with a punk rock soul. Front woman Anais affects a touch of Helen Kane in her electric performance, bringing a post-modern shimmy to her slinky, fringed dress. The band is tightly focused, pulling every ounce of energy from their instruments. The between song patter would benefit from a boost of this band's abundant collective energy, and songs that teeter on the edge of lyrical obscurity could use a set up.

Decked out in blood-spattered tuxedo shirts, The Fuxedos are both carnival barker and sideshow act. Front man Danny Shorago assembles a warped playroom onstage and plays the part of a demented child, making up stories and games for his own (and the audience's) amusement. Props and masks are thrown into the mix, yet what could become a tiresome gimmick is instead a constant surprise. Shorago is fully committed to the surreal chaos in which he revels, and the band keeps pace with unyielding force. They have an excellent stage presence, however the self-deprecation between songs wears a bit thin.

The Gleason has excellent acoustics, and the sound tech kept the levels balanced beautifully. Too often in this town bad sound turns good music into mush. That's not a problem at the Gleason.

These two bands are not going to be everyone's cup of tea, but the theatricality and immediacy they bring is well-worth seeking out if you have an adventurous spirit.

The Meanest Guy That Ever Lived at the Hudson Theatre

by Marcus Kaye~

Lily Spottiswoode's one-woman show, *The Meanest Guy That Ever Lived*, focuses on her grandfather's last moments after being moved home to die. Playing a multitude of characters in her family that "doesn't have breakfast, but has a morning cigarette," Spottiswoode embodies each of her family members and each of their journey's through dealing with the death of Spottiswoode's grandfather, Jack Palance.

Spottiswoode's strength is in her ability to vocalize. She is able

to change her tone, inflection and sound in a heartbeat, easily creating a different persona for each of her family members. Her grandfather's lover, Elaine, is particularly entertaining (as is her habit to drink, shed her clothes and run in the street). Spottiswoode has talent, and this show clearly showcases that.

Examining how people deal with death, *The Meanest Guy That Ever Lived*, could have had more meaningful, touching moments. It felt a little short and dry, leaving me yearning for more. More of Elaine. More of Jack Palance. More of Spottiswoode.

The Meanest Guy That Ever Lived plays June 19 at 8pm and June 26 at 9:30pm at the Hudson Theatre.

That Great & Dreadful Day-Tall Tales From The American Swamp at ComedySportz LA

by Ashley Steed~

I have a deep love for the blues, bluegrass and really anything that makes me stomp my feet and clap my hands. *That Great & Dreadful Day* weaves monologues (Jack E. Curenton) about a band in Louisiana with original music by D. Minor. The story chronicles Lawrence Douglas Minor's life from the roaring 20s to the 60s. Although Curenton does a great job with the monologues, evoking the classic oral story telling tradition of the Deep South, the real strength of this show is the music.

I was surprised to find out that all the songs were original music. I've never heard them before, yet they all sounded so familiar. It felt as if the Swamp Opera band had been playing together for ages. Special praise goes out to Mary Stuart who wrote and sang "Louisiana Blues." Her raspy and earthy voice goes straight through your soul. D. Minor as the lead guitarist and singer definitely knows how to get the audience to tap their toes.

The music and charismatic band more than make up for the weak storyline and amateurish acting. For anyone who loves bluegrass, Americana, folk, and the blues this is sure to entertain.

Plays June 27 at 3p, 7p and 11p

Sex, Lies and the KKK at Theatre Asylum

by Geoff Hoff~

Abie Philbin Bowman has a lot of energy. He is performing three separate shows at several venues in the Hollywood Fringe festival and is everywhere, all the time promoting them and the festival itself. *Sex, Lies and the KKK* is about sex, politics (hence "lies") and, yes, the KKK. It is a stand up comedy type monologue that is quite funny. Mr. Bowman knows more about American history and politics than most Americans and uses that knowledge well. This show was inspired by a radio show he hosted in Ireland on the eve of Barak Obama's election, in which he interviewed a leading member of the American KKK. Surprised that the person in question had no problem with any racial aspect, he delved a bit deeper and discovered that he actually had one or two small areas of agreement with this rather evil man. This sent him off on journey of thinking about sex, race, politics, gender, how we hold all of these diverse issues and how we lie to ourselves and others about them.

It was a bit sad that there were only three people in the audience during the performance I saw of Mr. Bowman's show. The theatre was out of the way and almost impossible to find, which may have had something to do with that. Mr. Bowman rose to the occasion, however, giving us energy sufficient for a large, full house.

Sex, Lies and the KKK plays again Sunday, June 27 at 1 pm.