



LA Theatre Review

Presents



The HollywoodFRINGE Daily Rag

Day Nine

Friday, June 25, 2010

Friends Like These at The Complex

by Rachel Stoll ~

Gregory Craft's play *Friends Like These* takes a challenging look at the violence and anger within our schools. Garrett, the main character, is marked as the outsider in his high school and spends the majority of his time in a fantasy world called Haven. When things start to improve for Garrett, it is ripped right out of his hands causing him to face his past and present. The play is full of violence and abuse, culminating in a tragic confrontation which leaves everyone devastated. Wonderfully written, *Friends Like These* is a must see play and will put a knot in your stomach by the end.

June 24, 25, 26 at 9:00 PM - June 26 at 1:00 PM

MaldonTemps: A Love Story at The Complex

by Robert Axelrod~

MALCON TEMPS starts out with singer-songwriter Phil Yates spinning three numbers accompanying himself on acoustic guitar. Okay so far. There are three chairs lined up down center on a bare stage which can only mean IMPROV. Two young women and one young man enter and introduce themselves as The Malcontents. They ask for an audience suggestion and get "cuddling". They then swing into a hard to follow improv that has nothing to do with the subject suggested. And so it goes for the next hour; hard to follow improvisations with no clear beginning, middle, and end, and very little in the way of characterization and time, place, form, and event. Nothing very funny comes from the proceedings except for a "zombie" theme that seems to work itself into every sketch.

I don't know where the name *MALCON TEMPS* comes from. Their postcard, which bills only two actors, Ben Compton and Gabrielle Sinclair, professes the show to be "A Love Story". I didn't see one. *MALCON TEMPS* is at The Complex Theater, 6476 Santa Monica Blvd, Hollywood. No running dates were advertised.

Ten West at Theatre of NOTE

by Joel Elkins~

Return to the days of vaudeville with the comedy duo of Ten West, now offering their offbeat style of physical humor at the Theatre of NOTE. Stephen Simon and Jon Monastero use a corny dramatic device as an excuse to perform a short series of vaudevillian comedy bits: two workers happen upon a room full of various costumes and props. As they try each one on in turn, the spirit transforms them into characters for the next skit.

They do some silly dance numbers, some lip-synching, a disturbing take on playing with dolls, but mostly just tried-and-true physical comedy, clearly meant as a loving tribute to the vaudeville classics. The duo fashion themselves clowns, so most all of the sketches are in pantomime, with the exception of a very clever ventriloquist routine. Simon's duet with his hat and coat is the

highlight of the show and itself worth the price of admission.

As G-rated family diversion that won't force you to think very hard, the humor doesn't always hit but is certainly crowd-pleasing.

Ten West perform June 24 at 8:15 p.m., June 25 at 10:30 p.m., June 26 at 10:15 p.m., June 27 at 6:15 p.m.

Bad Connections? at the Lounge Theatre

by Ashley Steed~

Stop. Look. Listen. Sage advice from the placid, amiable guru who serves as an anchor in the interweaving lives of the 8 other characters – each played distinctly by Paul Cosentino. The guru asks the class participants to think over the connections they've made that day and to look deeper. From the middle-aged Jewish wife, to the young pregnant black girl, to the gay Yoga instructor – these characters remind us that we're all connected.

Michael Levesque's script craftily interweaves the story lines, each one beginning where the previous one leaves off, eventually building up to interaction between characters. With Thom Fogarty's simple and genuine direction, Cosentino seamlessly flows from one character to the next. Although the script is not perfect (at times the text is contrived and the ending needs sharpening) between Cosentino's stage presence and the humor that catches you off guard, it is a truly satisfying piece of theatre.

The show relies heavily on Cosentino's acting prowess with subtle lighting shifts to set each scene. There are no gimmicks, highly charged dialogue or even that much action – what there is, however, is a reminder that there is no such thing as a bad connection. That if we take the time to stop, look and listen, then maybe we can get through.

Bad Connections? plays at the Lounge Theatre June 25, 26 at 8:00 PM and June 27 at 2:00 PM.

Eurpides' Medea at the Complex Theatre

by Rachel Jenkins~

The arrival of the chorus in the entrance way to the theatre instantaneously brings us into their world where we find TV static projected over a still-standing Jason (Kellen York) & Medea (Melissa Fenton). Using a combination of Eurpides' text, text adaptation, multimedia, choreographed movement & a whole lot of feathers we are taken through the pain of Jason's betrayal, Medea's response and an extremely visually stimulating representation of the emotions that drives her actions.

Director Michael Burke made an interesting & powerful decision by having the children represented by smiling, hanging dummies upstage center. Always there. Always watching. The chorus was perfectly in sync, used in a way that would have made the Greeks proud. Telling the story, echoing what needed emphasized and

breaking off to play roles as needed. Fenton created a multilayered Medea that allowed for understanding & sympathy even as she stood over her gutted children. On the other hand, York needs to go. He did not speak a sincere word. He felt nothing & neither did we. His lack of anything simply boosts my praise of Fenton for making so much out of the nothing he gave her.

This retelling, without stating why, provides answers to how a mother could murder her children, a question one often still has at the end of seeing *Medea*. Simply stated, Burke's *Medea* is new, beautiful & stimulating. Go find out how such a story can be told so well in so little space & time.

Medea plays June 25, 26 & 27 at 7pm.

***The Birthday Boys* at The Complex Theatres**

by Marcus Kaye~

To say that this very well may be the best thing to go up in the Fringe is an understatement. *The Birthday Boys* is written, directed and performed to perfection.

Playwright Aaron Kozak effortlessly taps into the psyches of three Prisoners Of War in Iraq. Painting a vivid and accurate picture of America's involvement in Iraq, the first act focuses solely on our three heroes, captured while keeping a storage unit secure. Bound and gagged, they are thrown into a warehouse, their futures left up to the darkness of their imaginations. They bond and somehow manage to find the humor in their situation, placing bets on whom will piss their pants first.

The second act introduces the terrorists and continues through their torture and plea videos to their families. As their bravery shrinks but their bond grows stronger, *The Birthday Boys* ends in a way you've got to see to believe.

The play is brilliantly acted by the three marines, who (given their blindfolds and arm and leg ties) are only allowed their voices and slight torso movements to communicate. And yet, they each draw distinct, believable characters from their limited range of motion. The emotions are real, and the play is dependent on the bond we see them form in the first act. Smartly written and thoroughly performed, nothing about these POWs feels disingenuous.

With raw emotion, distinct and intriguing characters and a look into the war in Iraq that is rarely seen, *The Birthday Boys* isn't to be missed.

The Birthday Boys plays June 24, 25 & 26 at 9pm and June 26 & 27 at 3pm

***His Minute Hand* at Complex Theatres**

by K. Primeau~

Page 121 evokes Vonnegut and Orwell in their young company's moving new wartime tragedy. The nonlinear structure follows Rip Lamplight (Lloyd Mulvey), a dedicated statesman in a time of war, as he carries out the latest brutal letter of the law. The current police state has forbidden women from leaving the house, so Rip's pregnant wife Hilda (Rebecca Newman) lives like a caged tiger in their home, rapping away the time on the drum of her distended tummy. When he discovers his best friend Charles (Christopher Salazar) has broken the law for his also-pregnant wife, Penelope (Nancy Noto), Rip's government allegiance mandates he enforce the disproportionate penalty. Time ticks forward and washes back as memories of pre-war cookouts and Hilda and Rip's unconventional courtship become white noise in the face of present stark reality. Amidst stunning imagery, the lives of two couples are set side by

side, one suffocating under the pressure of ugly machismo and the governing "Party," the other prematurely snuffed by a bewildering act of fear. Solid performances combined with Stephan Kaliski's brilliantly written characters makes for a venerable world premiere, despite makeshift sound design, some awkward moment to moment work, and a lack of concrete connection to the play's Present Day setting.

Everyday at 3 PM, and June 25 & 26 @ 7 PM @ Complex Theatres

***Valentino: a play in verse* at Complex Theatres**

by K. Primeau~

Being in power isn't easy, and Duke Valentino knows it. He has his father- the Pope, his trusty beefcake body guard, and the intellectually curious Leonardo Da Vinci around to remind him, but prefers to use his avarice-warped wits to diffuse the oncoming insurgency. In Dave Wischart's ottava rima, or irregularly rhyming verse, swordplay, beheadings, abortive beverages and Catholicism all have a place in the classic duel between men born into power and men desperately seeking it. Unfortunately, a tendency towards small, film-like acting stops the action short, as stakes never rise to a passion and life and death confrontations fly by largely unfelt. The actors seemed to assess the unique language with a casual regard rather than rising to the occasion, and many comedic moments were left un-mined. With such a unique literary concept, the production would have benefited from direction leaning toward the overly-theatrical, as malice, coercion, and cunning wit require a grandness and confidence to truly uphold. While corpses littered the stage, I wished the simple costuming had provided more elicit characterization, not knowing which parties from the show's large ensemble had faltered, as well as less distracting light and sound design. Special recognition belongs to stand out performances by Sam Fleischer as Machiavelli and Lachlan McKinney as Ramiro, who also served as fight choreographers on the piece.

June 25 & 26th @ 9 PM, 27th @ 8 PM at Complex Theatres

***Passion and Precision* at Tre Stage**

by Geoff Hoff~

Jake McGraw is opening up a new artists agency in Hollywood. He hires an assistant, Michele Loeb, who is very bold, has a mind of her own and looks great in a skirt. He then welcomes his only client, Trick Emerson, a screenwriter with a great screenplay called "Jungle Script". The passion of the title refers to the writer, the artist. The precision refers to the agent, slaving away at the details to sell his stuff. By the end of the play we discover that Hollywood is bad, agents are sneaky and manipulative and writers are neurotic.

The writer of this piece (Joe Massingill, who also plays the agent) has obviously had that quintessential Hollywood moment at the hands of an agent and is bitter about it. The three actors in this piece are all quite wonderful. Mr. Massingill is very convincing as the agent, as is the fellow who plays the writer, although he fumbles his lines a bit. The script is written by someone who can obviously write, although (to horribly paraphrase Amadeus) he relies on a LOT of words. Some of the interchanges are very interesting, but ultimately, the script is old, over the top and unconvincing. Some things simply don't make much sense. For instance, that a screenplay is so good and it's writer is so talented that someone is willing to open up a whole new agency simply to get him to compromise his morals doesn't scan.

June 20, 22, 23, 24 at 8:00 PM