

Grand-Guignol on the Prairie**Echo's Little Theatre—Ragpickers**

A chill rose through my spine as the spectacle started, not because of the eerie nature of the play, but due to the variety of hints that I would hate this production.

First, the troupe started with a four-piece harmony a cappella, providing a glimpse into what will come. At least two of the voices had several off-key moments, which augurs very poorly for what lies ahead. Second, I had to strain to hear the meek voices; I sat in the front row, a mere one metre from their faces. The greatest misgiving I had came with the drawing of the curtain, revealing a patient on a surgical bed, bloodied and bandaged. The opening scene showed the surgeon drilling a hole into the patient's head, killing her when he realised he bore into the wrong spot. As blood oozed out of the patient's head, fear oozed into my head—not that this will be a chilling thrill, but that this play will use excessive gore and cheap gags to try to elicit laughs. Although the singing has some issues throughout the play, the plot, the execution and the vocal projection improve vastly within the three stories.

The first play, *The Kiss of Blood* (a horror), despite its questionable intro, runs like a Poe story directed by Hitchcock. Although the blood continues to spurt, the strength of the story pushes the gore aside as if by a comedic arm. The second play, *Chop-Chop!* (a comedy) delivers some genuine laughs through its unlikely plot. Although the ending is predictable, the journey is pleasant (if you can call it that).

The final play, *The Sisters' Tragedy* (a drama), tugs at your heartstrings as it recounts the trial of a naïve girl burdened with an impossible situation. Her solution delivers happiness to everyone—although not everyone is as happy as she hopes.

The final play feels rushed as it speeds through its last scenes to come in under timelines. Another ten minutes to stretch the denouement would have

made this a truly powerful piece. As is, it's still a moving story that will jerk some tears.

Bravo to Echo for a trilogy of entertaining and enjoyable plays.

Ray Yuen

Aomega**DANIEL NIMMO—Son of Warehouse**

A street performer teaches us a thing or two about being an audience. While on the surface this might seem like 45 minutes or so of pure audience-participation silliness, on another level it is an exploration of what a performance means, and the dynamic between audience and performer.

Nimmo asks us to participate during this show, but I think he is also asking us to be active participants any time we go to the theatre. As Aristotle said, theatre should be a life-changing experience, so when Nimmo asks us if we have evolved yet he is really asking us if we have done our share of the work in the performance.

A truly original script and concept performed by a great artist. You really can't ask anything more. Now are you ready to do your part?

Kevin Longfield

G-Men Defectives**Tangelico—Planetarium**

Two lovable losers, Marmaduke and Garfield, meet on the street and decide to become secret agents and fight Commies.

It's love at first sight for them, but the conformism that results from paranoia about the possibility of being 'outed' prevents them from admitting this to themselves, so they repeatedly shy away from expressing this attraction physically.

The device also reminds us that FBI founder J. Edgar Hoover was rumoured to be a transvestite: apparently there's lots of room for hypocrisy in the spy world.

Spying also involves deception, and in this case it also involves a lot of self-deception, such as when one character quotes Hitler approvingly. It's an

illustration of how seductive fascism can be, and how close we can come to totalitarianism if we let fear rule our lives.

I realize that now I'm making this play sound terribly serious and earnest when in reality it's a sharp, fast-paced comedy, but since the CBC reviewer missed all the irony I thought that I might need to point it out.

Kevin Longfield

A Trip to Coney Island with Uncle Zero Boy**Zero Boy Productions—Son of Warehouse**

Sometimes taking a risk pays off. I didn't know anything about this show, but it fit my schedule.

The premise is that a rather sketchy uncle has his nephew foisted on him for the day, so they go to Coney Island. They have a great day together, and the audience gets to learn a lot about the history of Coney Island.

Oh, and did I mention that Zero Boy provides all the sound effects with his mouth? The show stands by itself without the sound effects, but what he does vocally is an absolute wonder.

He had a small house on Tuesday, but deserved far better.

Kevin Longfield

Tired Clichés**Acky-Made—Aqua Books**

As it had one of the few Dawe scripts I had not previously seen performed, I welcomed the chance to catch this show.

Alex Eddington makes no attempt to imitate Dawe's style of delivery, and as much as I appreciate the latter, that's a good thing; Eddington's highly stylized performance is all his own, conveying the twists and turns of a clever script with great atmosphere.

Every element of this script may indeed be a tired cliché, but if the show demonstrates anything, it's that these can still be combined in an ingenious and satisfying way. They wouldn't be clichés if they didn't speak to something about us.

Jeff Heikkinen

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