

## The Ukrainian Dentist's Daughter

Yana Kesala—Son of Warehouse

My seatmate said she had been chatting with Yana, the writer and performer. This touching tale is apparently real family history. The story is that of Yana's mother. Yana has crafted this history into a moving, lively and professional work you can't help but enjoy.

The story opens in Munich 1946 with a privileged daughter of a doting father (the local dentist) and a rather cold mother. She's a joyous three-year-old who dances about the house. Our story ends up in Manhattan 1967 with our heroine an anxious bride-to-be.

This beautiful and graceful actress owns the stage and our hearts as she shares her story with us. There are Ukrainian songs and dialog. So if you have relatives who are fluent in the language and culture, bring them for a treat.

Lisa Campbell

## Back to Berlin

Death & Taxes Theatre—Rory Runnels Studio

This is a very touching work, performed and written by Vern Thiessen, and is a companion piece to *The Courier* also at this venue. In 45 minutes, Vern shares a father-and-son tale of his journey to his father's homeland, Munich, Germany. His father sees this as his "last chance" to revisit his youth.

I found myself laughing with the difficulties of dealing with an aging father, which I share. The son learns much he didn't know before. He says all his father cares about is peeing and parking, but the son learns there is much more to him. He even gets drunk with his dad for the first time. The son, who thinks he knows it all, learns about himself as he learns about the history of his dad and mom.

There is more to the play but I don't want to say too much, other than that you should see it.

Lisa Campbell

## Afterlives

Surreal SoReal—Rachel Browne Studio

I'd like to say a few words about some of the "Fringier" (weirder or more experimental) shows I see most years, and *Afterlives* is certainly my Fringiest outing this year.

This is a collection of three short plays, told chiefly through mime and dance—with very little conventional dialogue—that I thoroughly enjoyed (well, two out of the three, but that's enough for me to recommend the show as a whole, and I think I get some credit for doing so without mentioning any cheesy Meat Loaf songs).

Each mini-play opens with a scene that makes little immediate sense, but will prove to be the last, not first, scene of the play chronologically, and clicks into place again at the end.

The first deals with two brothers, one of whom can come back from death, with the aid of the other (contrary to some other reviews, only one of them has the ability to bring back the other this way, and as this is a major plot point, confusion about it isn't a good sign). Set to an exciting soundtrack with somewhat of an 80s feel, this is probably the strongest part of the show.

The third and last part is a Depression-era fable wonderfully set to Rhapsody in Blue. It is also compelling, especially considering that you can, in my experience, swing an awful lot of cats without hitting anyone who dislikes that piece of music. (No actual cats were harmed in ascertaining this.)

The middle part was the weakest, partly because it was the only one where I had difficulty following the story (though the person I was with said she "got" this one but not the final part). It was probably about the same length as the others, but felt longer even though, or maybe because, a lot less seemed to happen in it. The music in it, unlike the other two, also did nothing for me; looking at the program, I was not at all surprised to find some of it was by Philip Glass,

the worst—or at least most overrated—composer of all time, notable chiefly for his ability to layer new meaning into the word "boring". If there is a presentation of Glass' work capable of giving me a new appreciation for it, this wasn't it.

Still, what was good about the first and last of the three mini-plays more than outweighed what was less than good about the second. On the whole, I'd recommend this show to anyone willing to take a chance on something more experimental.

Jeff Heikkinen



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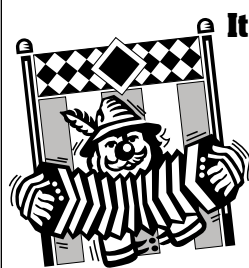
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