

Exhibitionism

Chronicle Review

CRUCKS: ODD RHUMBA, MAD TANGO

**The Public Domain,
through August 8**

Running Time: 1 hr, 30 min



Like statues in a house of wax, they take their poses. The music starts ? tumbling drum rolls ? and they come to life, each engaged in his or her own private rhumba toward a table, totally barren save for a lone bottle of wine, center stage. It is a macabre dance of sorts, these grotesque figures coming at you. They're here to spend an evening in your company ? an hour and a half of it, at least ? and from the looks of things, these oddballs are everyone you avoid at your family reunion. There's Meliss (Sarah Richardson) and Maurike (Jon Watson), the wan, chalky-faced duo in Fifties-era clothing who are occasionally confined to wheelchairs. Then there's Mird (Gavin Mundy) and Monic (Lana Lesley), looking like two rejects from the French Foreign Legion. And in the middle of them all is Gaylen (Robert Newell), our not-so-reliable narrator of sorts, rallying this freak show around the family table, where they attempt to find some structure and tradition after the death of their parents.

That's all I presume to know about the plot of *Crucks*, except that the five orphans also occasionally don thick beards and outrrrageous French accents for no apparent reason. Indeed, *Crucks* is a bit like what might result if Eugène Ionesco wrote *Party of Five* ? catty, quibbling sibs in heat, with the absurdism and opaque comedy that that playwright made famous. So if, 30 minutes into the show, you're still groping around for the hook, stop. It's not there. Or if it is, it's damn slippery. But if you can sit back and watch the dance, it's an unpredictable, darkly amusing, and disquieting piece of theatre. It's also winningly performed, with juicy, hammy performances all around, continuing Rude Mechanicals' tradition of strong ensemble acting.

Kirk Lynn's "Faminly Trilogy" (the mix of family and famine accounts for the seeming typo) began last year with the enthusiastically received *Lust Supper* and continues here with part two. While wholly independent plays, both involve a family and a bottle of wine, as will the final installment, *Salivation*. The script runs on a great deal of pregnant pauses and eerie, portentous dialogue ("It's for the children" followed by "We aaare the children") that can grow a bit tiresome, but the play never sputters out, despite the little narrative fueling it. If you're frustrated by theatre that presents no clear thesis, that eludes your next logical step and refuses to place the puzzle pieces where you want them to go, then *Crucksis* probably not your gig. If you find liberation in mayhem, in giddy weirdness, in a playful narrative that tangos, dips, and sidesteps as you try to keep up, *Crucks* might just be the high point of your evening. *Sarah Hepola*