

Exhibitionism

SALIVATION: BUBBLY INTOXICANT

Hyde Park Theatre,
through December 5
Running time: 2 hrs, 10 min



The much-anticipated third course to Rude Mechanicals' Faminly trilogy is served. And with it, Rude Mechs' playwright-in-residence Kirk Lynn has honed another intelligent and boisterous concoction surrounding family, famine, and a mysterious and much-desired bottle of wine. With an ever-increasing mess of double crosses, double entendres, and seeing double, *Salivation* pours out all over the stage (and theatre) like a bubbly intoxicant.

It isn't all easy going, however, and in throwing so much material in so many directions, the show lacks a certain aesthetic consistency. The play is a cartoon, a puppet show, a bawdy, sloppy, rowdy, goofy dream come true, with a sentimental tinge at the end. Because it encompasses so much, the play sometimes gets away from comfortable storytelling, reveling instead in what amounts to petit cabaret skits or sideshow acts. Sometimes the skits work, sometimes they don't, but they're all infused with Rude Mechs' patented energy and verve. There is an early homage to Theatre of the Absurd: bizarre grandparents who appear from behind upstage curtains and screen recall Nag and Nell from Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, but that quickly metamorphoses into Rude Mechs' folksier sense of absurdity. Theirs is a colorful and multidisciplinary playpen, made even more garish and fun by set designer Ann Marie Gordon and costume designer Marit Aagaard's bright, zany, over-crowded house with its host of desperate residents and unexpected visitors.

Anne Engelking makes a sympathetic Gerta: desperate for food, growing agonizingly large during her rapid pregnancy. Robert Pierson, as her husband Paul, is as clumsy as Catherine Glynn's thief, Al Jeers, is smooth. Joey Hood makes a warm and fuzzy grouch of Jeers' robot sidekick, Moods. Playing Grammy and Granddaddy, Madge Darlington and Michael T. Mergen put the most energy and foot-stompin' enthusiasm into the play. Playful with a slightly wicked competitive streak, the oldsters skirt lunacy with a youthful recklessness. Director Gavin Mundy handles most of this variety show well, with a sense of good-natured precision (gotta know *when* to make the mess).

Playwright Lynn starts his play off with a bang. That's a pun (when you see *Salivation*, you'll get it) and herein lies much of the fun, and frustration, of the production. Wordplay for Lynn takes precedence; verbal gags, prosody, and quick witticisms work (or don't work) the instant they are uttered but rarely beyond that. Lynn is so clearly a smart playwright, but he tends to wear his cleverness on his sleeve. Rare are the moments when his genius is subsumed by character development or narrative; the jokes become the focal point. In staking so much on these disconnected word games, the play's rhythm becomes staccato, the storytelling unfulfilling. It is not until the last act that the various threads of earlier wordplay are twisted together, when the audience is treated to the variety of enjoyable machinations and discoveries that leave such a good taste in the mouth. --
Robi Polgar