

Exhibitionism

Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind: Play Full

Electric Lounge

through June 28

Running time: 1 hr



photograph of Lana Lesley

What constitutes a play? Dramatic conflict? Plot? Characters? Does a work need to have a narrative to be a play? A setting? Dialogue? What if the dialogue is only gibberish - is it still a play? What if it isn't performed by prepared actors, can you call it a play? Does it have to be a certain length? Can you have a play that lasts two minutes? Or one? Less?

In the theatrical free-for-all *Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind*, a gang of Chicago theatre artists called the Neo-Futurists has done its darnedest to defy whatever preconceptions you might have about what makes a play. They have created a catalogue of short plays - *very* short: three minutes or less - some of which barely begin before they end, some of which lurch from start to finish without a whisper of conflict, some of which are peopled principally by toys. They sketch out situations, throw a satirical punch, a dramatic jab, and scoot. Some may call them scenes or gags or "performance pieces." Their creators call

them plays.

Austin's own Rude Mechanicals have got hold of a batch of these Neo-Futurist plays and are presenting them at the Electric Lounge in the literally trademarked style of the pieces' creators, that is, *30 Plays in 60 Minutes*^{reg.}. The Mechanicals hand out menus that list the plays with numbers by the titles, tell the audience that *it* will dictate the order of performance by shouting out the numbers of the plays, hit the one-hour time clock that sits prominently on the stage, and go, charging through 30 works in... well, you know.

In the manic hour of performance, the six actors in the Austin production prove themselves well-suited to the material. They race into place at the start of scenes, make sweeping gestures, shout, sneer, grin, pop their eyes. In the Chekhovian spoof *Uncle Vodka*, they douse each other with cup after cup of water, soaking shirts, faces, hair, stage. In the ridiculously silly gimmick play *Deja Chicken*, they repeat the scene they just concluded in henspeak, enthusiastically clucking all the dialogue like giddy geeks. Always they are physically engaged, and their energy and boldness of choice helps these short, punchy scenes connect with the crowd like boxers' blows. It jazzes the crowd, too, so that when six members of the audience are recruited to play all the roles in *Understudy* (this reviewer was one), they do so with verve.

In the end, a play is not best defined by a formal set of characteristics. A play is what you make it. What the Mechanicals make is a revel, an exuberant celebration of play - the verb - in which the artists join *with* the audience to make believe, to dream, to invent new worlds, new places to be. With plays such as that, 30 is hardly enough. Let's have 60! 100! More!!

-- Robert Faires