

Observer

A QUESO FOUNTAIN, BUSBY BERKELEY AND OTHER REASONS TO SEE *STOP HITTING YOURSELF*

BY LAUREN SMART
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Erin Baino/AT&T Performing Arts Center

This Is the First Time the Rude Mechanicals Have Been to Dallas

Just a quick hop down 35, the state's most interesting theater troupe call Austin home. There, for the past two decades, the **Rude Mechs** been devising new work that has earned raves from critics for its inventive staging, satirical wit and compelling theater. And though they've been all over the country, this is the first time a theater in Dallas has hosted them. Their new show, *Stop Hitting Yourself*, is in town this weekend only, May 28-30, at the Wyly Theatre **as part of the Off Broadway on Flora series.**

Inspirations Include Busby Berkeley, Ayn Rand, Vegas and *Pygmalion*

Everything is coated in gold, or at least a golden color. They wanted to learn how to tap dance like in the Busby Berkeley *Gold Diggers* movies. They wanted to tell a story that explored late stage capitalism (One actress read Ayn Rand's *Anthem* cover to cover.). They wanted to write music, and sing songs, so Graham Reynolds wrote them dizzying, raucous, and occasional sentimental music. It's a spectacle that is as fun as it is thought-provoking.

There Is a Queso Fountain

Anyone who grew up in Texas will understand that for the Rude Mechs, queso is a symbol that they've made it. After all, it's the thing you order in addition to those free chips and salsa. For one of the co-writers, Shawn Sides, love for the cheesy dip runs even deeper. "I was in grad school in New York writing poems about queso," admits Sides. "They didn't really have it there, so I was trying to help my fellow students understand and come to Queso Jesus." For *Stop Hitting Yourself*, they modeled the queso fountain after the chocolate fountain at the Bellagio in Las Vegas. Of the making, Sides is the first to admit exactly how difficult it has been. "It had to be really runny," she says. "I couldn't use any Rotel like I do in my recipe."

The Show Is Filled With Surprises

The play takes place at the Queen's Palace, where the so-called Wildman is being trained to compete in the Charity Ball, which awards one lowly citizen the honor of being the recipient of the queen's annual good deed. Hypocrisies abound. As the play unravels, the actors step out of their characters and into the spotlight for rounds of confessions. "Part of the game of this play is to reveal the queen's palace within it," says co-writer Kirk Lynn. "It's not a fun play if we just make fun of Ayn Rand. So we look at different kind of hypocrisies that they participate in, what we spend money on. It's easy to point at the world or look at the Bellagio — but to look at your own life. Like right now, I'm talking on a beautiful iPhone 6 that I don't want to give up." Also, an audience member might just receive a \$20 bill.

You've Never Seen Anything Like It

A smart show performed by smart people, *Stop Hitting Yourself* is packed with truths about how we interact with our fellow humans. Plus, the play is all kinds of sexy. This kind of theater packed with infectious energy and dripping with cheese-coated charm doesn't come to Dallas often, and it won't be here for long. You're likely to fall out of your chair laughing at the play, and, really, at yourself.

The cheap seats are all sold out, so tickets start at \$39. Grab 'em at attpac.org.