



## Stop Hitting Yourself



Photograph: Erin Baiano | Stop Hitting Yourself

## Time Out says

Tue Jan 28 2014

***Stop Hitting Yourself***. [Claire Tow Theater](#) (see [Off Broadway](#)). Created by Rude Mechs. Written by Kirk Lynn. Directed by Shawn Sides. With ensemble cast. Running time: 1hr 30mins. No intermission.

### ***Stop Hitting Yourself*: In brief**

The Texas experimental-theater troupe [Rude Mechs](#), which wowed New York in 2011 with *The Method Gun*, returns with Kirk Lynn's parable—inspired by the style of 1930s musicals—about a socialite who tries to civilize a good-hearted forest dweller in time for a royal ball. Shawn Sides directs.

### ***Stop Hitting Yourself*: Theater review by David Cote**

Who knows if doctors will ever cure affluenza and wealth addiction, those newly minted maladies brought on by excessive money and greed? But I can prescribe a treatment for the nonprofit blues—the debilitating funk that descends on playgoers who see far too many naturalistic, living room– or office-set Off Broadway dramas with negligible political content. The medicine in question is *Stop Hitting Yourself*, a fiendishly clever satire by Rude Mechs, a gonzo collective based in Austin. This ingenious piece of devised theater has appeared like a golden unicorn in the normally staid environs of the Claire Tow Theater, where well-mannered dramaturgy tends to dominate.

Actually, a gold-plated horse is just about the only thing you won't spot on set sorceress Mimi Lien's latest wonder, which conjures up the fabulously tacky palace of the Queen (Paul Soileau, affecting a poststroke slur). A jaw-dropping spectacle of Liberacean excess, the cluttered playing space houses a honey-yellow baby grand, statues, chairs, columns, chandeliers—and, in case you missed the point, a giant dollar sign in lights. This auric overload ain't subtle and it ain't small.... Let's remember that the Rudes hail from Texas.

This cockeyed materialist fable, penned by Kirk Lynn and directed by Shawn Sides (and developed by the ensemble), follows the tragic tale of one Wildman (Thomas Graves, serious as his surname), an unkempt, hairy naturist plucked from his Edenic home by a Socialite (foxy Lana Lesley) so that he can compete in a charity ball thrown annually by the obscenely rich Queen. Socialite's weaselly husband, the Magnate (E. Jason Liebrecht), chooses the Unknown Prince (Joey Hood) as his champion for the ball. Along for the ride are the spoiled Trust-Fund Sister (Hannah Kenah) and the Queen's Maid (Heather Hanna).

Lynn's loose, tricky script is an assemblage of scenes, monologues, torch songs, tap-dance routines and games with the audience. (At one point, the Magnate offers \$1 to ticket holders to perform various acts—up to and including completely disrobing.) The obvious target is our culture's lust for treasure and comfort, but Lynn plays devil's advocate so well, he puts scarily convincing arguments for greed and despoiling the planet into the mouths of the most sympathetic characters. (Not for nothing is Ayn Rand one of the main sources of inspiration here.) Sides's staging draws together sketch comedy, camp, cabaret, and that most seductive and glittery of all theatrical forms: the Broadway-style musical.

Although the staging, performances and writing are all keenly balanced on the edge of polished and punk, the play as a whole does slightly stall at the 60-minute mark, in the run-up to the (surreally violent and fondue-filled) charity ball. However, even if some bits come off as repetitive or underthought, there's always humor and bite.

And anyway, *Stop Hitting Yourself* feels incredibly fresh. That Paige Evans, artistic director of LCT3, commissioned this piece after seeing the Rudes' equally stunning [The Method Gun](#) in 2011 is hugely heartening. It's like the Roundabout ordering a new work by the Debate Society or Manhattan Theatre Club opening Young Jean Lee's latest outrage at the Samuel J. Friedman. Already the Public Theater is bridging the worlds of downtown and uptown with Under the Radar and its year-round programming. And hell, who could imagine Will Eno's name on a [Broadway marquee](#)? If experimental-theater makers keep trickling up to more professional stages, it can only benefit us all. And perhaps a little corruption might be good for them.

—*Theater review by David Cote*