

Review: 'The Method Gun'

By Jeanne Claire van Ryzin | Tuesday, April 14, 2009, 02:14 PM

The Rude Mechs can't help themselves. They have to tweak whatever they do every time they do it. And with 'The Method Gun' — the theater collective's much-heralded play from last season — the tweaks, and the Rudes, are alright.

Better than alright actually. To this critic, 'The Method Gun' still ranks as one of the best productions to grace the Austin theater scene in the past few years. I said as much last year when I reviewed the show's premiere, one of the many productions that helped open up the Long Center for the Performing Arts.

But now the Rudes are back home at the Off-Center, their East Austin warehouse performance space. And now 'The Method Gun' packs more intensity and more poignancy. In the Long Center's Rollins Studio Theater, the show featured plenty of visual — and theatrical — volume. In the much more intimate Off-Center, there's no escaping the emotionally raw yet ultimately endearing ride. And the Rudes' tweaks have made it all much more immediate and personal.



Of course, the sweet absurdity is still there. What's not absurd about a group of actors still following an illusory acting guru named Stella Burden long after she has disappeared. So fixated with Burden's acting technique — the method known as 'The Method Gun' — this group can't let their guru go. Burden's biggest challenge to her troupe? Present a production of Tennessee Williams' 'A Streetcar Named Desire' performed without any of the principal characters.

Isn't that an impossibility?

But, oh, does the troupe — superbly acted by Thomas Graves, Heather Hannah, Jude Hickey, Hannah Kenah and Lana Lesley — try hard to make it work. They put themselves through humiliating exercises, frustrate themselves with acting challenges and otherwise unravel their emotions. They fight each other, they kiss each other, they scream at one another. They fumble with out-dated audio-visual equipment, plunk out tunes on a piano and consult a miniature tiger figurine that Stella Burden held dear.

Played in a series of quick-fire almost hallucinatory scenes that ricochet around in time, the play (the script was written by Kirk Lynn) seemingly in brilliant manner builds and unravels at the same time.

And the final scene — Stella Burden's principal-less 'Streetcar' — emerges as one of the most polished, gorgeous, breathtaking and riveting moments on an Austin stage.

The Rudes Mechs plan to take 'The Method Gun' to New York's P.S. 122 next year. Let's hope the folks realize what we already know: The Rudes craft compelling theater.

'The Method Gun' continues 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday through May 2 at the Off Center, 2211 Hidalgo St. See www.rudemechs.com for ticket information.

Photo by Bret Brookshire.