

Review: The Method Gun

The Rude Mechs from Texas explode acting-guru clichés. *Helen Shaw*



Categories

Comedy, Drama,
Experimental

Keywords

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Dance Theater Workshop

By Kirk Lynn. Dir. Shawn
Sides. With ensemble cast.
1hr 30mins. No
intermission.

We can agree that collectively created work entails certain risk, even leaving aside, in the case of *The Method Gun*, the eponymous loaded pistol hanging upstage. Give enough people control, and slackness can set in; keep that group together, and technique can turn rigid and self-obsessed. Luckily, the long-lived Austin troupe the Rude Mechs laughs in the face of those very dangers. In this immensely funny, abruptly touching physical-theater work—devised in concert, codified by playwright Kirk Lynn—the Rudes dice with any number of devils. They examine their own dynamic by inventing an acting guru (and then using real-world grants to research her); they flourish the aforementioned gun; they add a tiger. They keep taking perilous theatrical leaps, but we are the ones to feel sweaty-palmed, nearly vertiginous exhilaration.

In the sly concentric structure, the actors play reenactors of other actors—namely, fake '70s drama coach Stella Burden's acolytes, who have persevered with a nine-year rehearsal of *A Streetcar Named Desire* even after her disappearance. We bounce among retrospective lecture-demonstrations, re-created rehearsals employing Burden's hazardous acting strategies and interventions by a sambaing tiger. (E. Jason Liebrecht murmurs feline thoughts into a mike: "Remember, any moment, I could run through and eat the person you are most bored with! Rowr!") Moments shift between sweet humor and blissful absurdity, and even slow scenes set up roller-coaster drops. Hodgepodge structure needs just exactly this: director-actor Shawn Sides operating with rare unifying magic, shy Thomas Graves doing a neck-or-nothing dance, Hannah Kenah and Lana Lesley doing scraps of *A Streetcar* so rhythmically delightful, you want to see the rest of it, whether it takes them nine years or not.

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