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Match-Play

The Off Center, through Oct. 8

Running time: 1 hr, 15 min

One housemate is sitting in a chair on an isolated block of linoleum and appears to be recounting a story of some kind in elaborate detail, but it's difficult to be certain because she makes no sound. Another housemate is concerned that the package that just arrived in the oven/mailbox contains a severed head, but she doesn't want to open it and so can't be sure it contains what she thinks it contains. A third housemate records his experiences and musings about life but never, never rewinds the tape and listens to them, preferring to mail them to others and imagine that the thoughts of the people he knows may be his own coming back to him through them. A fourth housemate is just back from France, where he read in *Le Figaro* that planes consider themselves the loneliest creatures on the planet, a fact not reported in the domestic press. The answering machine, which has listened to enough messages to acquire sentience, aspires to have its status upgraded to that of full housemate, but since only four housemates are allowed, for that to happen someone will have to leave. Oh, yes, and the talking cow who sticks her head in through the kitchen window is and the talking cow who sticks her head in through the kitchen window is curious about whether they're all going to moo-oo-oo-ve.

And you thought life in your household was complicated.

In the residence into which we're invited for the Rude Mechanicals' *Match-Play*, a theatrical piece inspired by Deborah Hay's *The Match*, folks have a lot on their minds. If you know Hay's dances – and especially if you know *The Match* from its performance at the Off Center last January – pulling a play out of one of them might seem beyond imagining. But the Rude Mechs have pulled off the impossible with their characteristic aplomb, here using a heavy helping of absurdity and a dollop of wonder. The script's mix of original material by Kirk Lynn and free-for-the-taking Richard Foreman text gives *Match-Play* something of the feel of an episode of *The Real World* as conceived by Eugene Ionesco. We're witness to the requisite scenes of domestic travails and prickly exchanges among folks who share living quarters, but instead of drinking binges and sexual encounters, we get explosive bursts of curious choreography, a man screaming expletives at his alarm clock, and a talking cow. It's as odd as it sounds but also frequently and consistently hilarious, given the way Rudes Lana Lesley, Shawn Sides, and Lynn, with special guest Rude Barney O'Hanlon, inhabit these intellectually challenged housemates.

Not that you need a thread of meaning to enjoy *Match-Play*, given the eye-grabbing visuals (Leilah Stewart's mid-20th-century interior decor by way of Magritte, the cast all sporting bleached-blond coifs and decked out in Laura Cannon-crafted white outfits with plastic accents) and the vigorous performances, which mix comedic precision with exuberant evocations of Hay's dance, but that intellectual challenge can provide one. In this world, everyone is thinking, even the livestock, aircraft, and appliances. They're all testing the limits of consciousness, questioning perceptions, trying to crack the nut of what we know about the universe around us. Hay has been at this for decades and bases much of her work on the concept of trying to activate perception in every cell of her body simultaneously, awakening and synthesizing thousands upon thousands of individual and unique experiences of space and time. It's an impossibility for most mere mortals, and the Rudes have concocted a novel theatrical spin on the absurdity of that. Still, these characters are onto something, and even in the midst of their little household dramas, they're thinking big, about questions as vast as the sky, as vast as that incredible intellectual engine in our heads that we use, what, 10% of? The idea of expanding that capability and kicking open those doors of perception is where the engaging and funny *Match-Play* strikes home, igniting the intellect.