

## Jana O'Connor comedy a Teatro triumph

Posted on June 23, 2017

By Colin MacLean

Entertainment, Front Slider, Theatre



I haven't laughed so hard at the Varscona Theatre ... well, since the last play by Teatro La Quindicina.

The current production of the screwball comedy *Going, Going, Gone!* at the Varscona Theatre until July 1 launches the writing career of a radiant new comic talent. Jana O'Connor is a long time member of the Teatro creative team and is probably best known today for the hilarious parade of broadly comic characters with whom she has peopled her weekly appearances on the CBC's highly rated (and highly comic) radio series *The Irrelevant Show*. Laughter is never far from everything she does. Obviously O'Connor has ample comic performance smarts, which she puts to use in her first full length play. From the sparkling results – she's a natural.

**The upbeat twinkle and shine of what's to come is perfectly set up by director Dave Horak's choice of Le Jazz Hot for his soundtrack – featuring the master himself, Django Reinhardt. The cast bounds on stage, perfectly in character, and begins to arrange**

**Chantel Fortin's ingenious and highly usable set. It consists of walls, doors and a few pieces of furniture – all on wheels that can be simply assembled by the actors to create any number of rooms.**

The plot is complex beyond description and depends on an unending series of situations where an embarrassed character creates filigrees of fantasy sinking deeply into increasingly ludicrous circumstances.

**Horak has assembled a dream cast.** Our nerdy hero, channeling Harold Lloyd's straw boater and the Cary Grant character in *Bringing Up Baby*, is masterfully played by Andrew MacDonald-Smith, as an unassuming antiques dealer trying to track down two valuable George III candlesticks. MacDonald-Smith is the winner of two Sterling Awards and may be on the way



next week to win his third for his performance as the singing and dancing whiz, Bobby, in the Citadel's *Crazy for You*.

When bidding on one of the candlesticks at an auction, he drops his paddle and gets down on one knee to retrieve it – only to rise and discover to his surprise that he is now engaged to seat partner Celina Dean. Dean's character is prickly, husband-hunting and marcelled to the hilt. From the program, this long-time Teatro vet seems to be the busiest actress-singer in North America. Rachel Bowron is a bystander who mistakenly picks up MacDonald-Smith's suitcase in a train station and sets him on a course get it back. Bowron is a stand-out comic actress known for performances at the Citadel and the Mayfield Dinner Theatre. Davina Stewart is MacDonald-Smith's oh-so-sophisticated (and hot and horny) mother.

And that gets us to Mark Meer. He just finished a stand-out turn as the hilarious automaton in Lemoine's *Salon of the Talking Turk*. In this one he plays almost the entire catalogue of the justly famous supporting players in Warner Brothers stock company of the 1930s. He's every movie butler and waiter you've ever seen (no one "shoots the cuff" with more aplomb than Mark Meer). At other times he's an amorous Italian gardener with an accent as thick as a Neapolitan ragu. He's Paul Lynde as an unctuous Maitre D' and Lionel Barrymore as a bewildered father caught up in the tall tales around him. He's the world's shortest auctioneer, which leads to one of the funniest physical gags of the evening. At one time, he changes characters so fast two of them seem to be on the stage at the same time. He'll go out a door, there comes an instant knock and he bounds immediately back into the room as a completely different character. I could go on (and he does – getting funnier and funnier), but you get the idea.

It is a tour-de-force for this awesomely talented artist. The Sterling Award-winning actor also plays the heroic Commander Shepard in the huge internationally-selling video game *Mass Effect*, and appears weekly on *The Irrelevant Show*. He's worth the price of the ticket alone.

Leona Brausen's costumes are bang-on – right out of every screwball comedy film you've ever seen.

**Director Horak sure gets it. There's no line, grimace or double-take thrown away – unless it's a throw-away line. He fills the play with inspired business. And with the help of his superlative cast, darn if there isn't something of a beating heart behind all those funny lines as well.**

Congratulations to all.

## **Going, Going, Gone! a sparkly new Teatro screwball from Jana O'Connor, reviewed**

Posted on [June 23, 2017](#)

by [Liz Nicholls](#)



Andrew MacDonald-Smith and Rachel Bowron in *Going, Going, Gone!*, Teatro La Quindicina! Photo by Mat Busby.

“I can explain...”

Just guessing, but those three words have sent more screwballs hurtling into comedy space than any other phrase in the lexicon, including “I’ll get the door.”

Every time you hear them in *Going, Going, Gone!*, a **sparkly, appealingly warm-hearted new 30s-style screwball by sketch and improv comedy star Jana O'Connor**, its escalating tower of lies teeters crazily. In Teatro La Quindicina's premiere production, directed by **Dave Horak**, our cautious, serious-minded, habit-bound hero is realizing, with some alarm, that while he's become “inadvertently engaged” to one woman, he's on a madcap impromptu adventure with another.

Only spontaneity can save him now. And spontaneity isn't something you can plan for. It's life as improv. Fun if you're up for it, the way Edie (Rachel Bowron) is. Terrifying if you're not, the way nerdy antiques dealer Grant Carlyle (Andrew MacDonald-Smith) isn't.



Celina Dean, Andrew MacDonald-Smith in *Going, Going, Gone!*, Teatro La Quindicina. Photo by Mat Busby.

The tingly boost you get from screwball comedies is the way they lift the weight of expectation from the shoulders of their characters. And they watch, amused, as inevitability gets replaced by something airier and more effervescent, but in a way more substantial: the sense of possibility.

**Horak's production sets forth that proposition physically in his highly amusing stagecraft of the jaunty, speedy opening scene. It's wordless but set to sprightly Stephane Grappelli/ Django Reinhardt tunes.**

The set pieces — multiple doors, screens, mirror — exist in both real and painted 2-D versions in Chantel Fortin's amusing design (lit by Matthew Alan Currie). **And they're assembled with jazzy bustle by Horak's all-star cast. It comes down to a physical counterpoint duet, on either side of the stage, between a man who is ironing his socks before he puts them on, and a larky woman trying on dresses and stockings, rejecting them and casually flinging them down.** Bowron is enchantingly vivacious as Edie, born to wear red lipstick and say breezily "sorry, I can't hear you over all those bubbles!"

The official fiancée (Celina Dean, returning to Teatro after a decade's absence), is high contrast. Betsy is a formidably brittle sort, a chicken factory heiress with a disapproving air. She's bent on (a) marriage and (b) prospects, namely a more impressive income than Grant's "little hobby" with "that antique-y thing" can possibly provide. Dean gives her a soprano trill of a laugh that could shatter frozen poultry at 100 paces.

And the wonderful MacDonald-Smith is alert to every comic possibility in a tentative bloke for whom the pursuit of a George III candlestick has the only kind of urgency he has ever experienced — until now. As Grant, a non-swimmer, so to speak, in the sea of romance fumbling his way to stay afloat, MacDonald captures anxious nerdism with sublime expertise. The grimace of sheer horror — even his straw boater seems taken aback — with which he greets the sight of his free-spirit mother (Davina Stewart) in the arms of her Latino lover will make you smile out loud.

I know, I haven't told you a thing about what sets O'Connor's amazingly intricate screwball plot in motion. I can explain.... Just kidding. Anyhow, two objects figure prominently: a George III candlestick and Grant's Great-Gran's diamond ring. There's a moment, a crucial moment, when both go AWOL and order gives at the seams. And it's a classic of period screwballs, farces, and espionage capers world-wide: two identical suitcases get switched at the train station and leave with the wrong people.

Panic ensues on the part of one of those people — and I leave you to guess which one.

**O'Connor and Horak hang a multi-character plot of surpassing complexity on the comic virtuosity of one man, Mark Meer.** As required, moment to moment, Meer switches out every '30s supporting character: bellhop to waiter to Lothario, crusty old rich guy father to prim desk clerk, eight or more. Sometimes, hilariously, he's two in the same scene, with O'Connor lines to match: "Never fails!" barks Edie's dad with cheery exasperation, re-entering the scene after the exit of the waiter. "You leave the table, the waiter comes...."

The most riotous of all is Meer as a gravel-voiced auctioneer so short he can't be seen over the podium. There's a laugh-out-loud fight scene I won't spoil for you.

It's not a quickie play: the panic takes time and scenes get played out at length. People say "I can explain" ... and then they actually do. So you'll have time to savour the fun of Leona Brausen's assembly of '30s costumes: Bowron spends much of the play wearing a bowed polka-dot chapeau that should get its own curtain call.

At the heart, and there is one, of *Going, Going, Gone!* is unpremeditated self-discovery by a man who has hitherto always ordered the Salisbury steak in restaurants. His gradual, reluctant transformation into a man who's up for trying the special of the day — without even knowing what it is — will lighten your heart, and make you laugh.

And this transformation is surrounded by other discoveries, too. Though parental expectation is a traditional obstacle to happiness in comedy — not to mention a compelling reason for the escalating web of lies — O'Connor in the end has a soft spot for the older generation. The Act I scenes between father and daughter and mother and son change contours in their Act II counterparts.

Adventures, it seems, happen in increments. But as in auctions, there's a fleeting life-changing moment before the gavel comes down and the candlestick of your dreams goes to someone else, when the cosmic fun quotient is up for grabs.

As its title hints, the show is a short-run proposition (it ends July 1). After that, *Gone!*. So the moment to enjoy a full-on screwball assault on caution is now.

# Stupid Fucking Bird gives wing to Chekhov

Posted on March 3, 2017

By Colin MacLean

Entertainment, entertainment, Front Slider, Theatre



Anton Chekhov is best known outside of Russia as a playwright of yearning disappointment, unrequited love, missed opportunities and unsatisfactory relationships.

He actually thought he was writing a comedy when he penned a play called *The Seagull* in 1896 – and therein lies a part of the problem. According to those who know about these things, many of the translations rely on an original “prepared by a Russian with no knowledge of the stage”



and often produced with little care for the Russian ethos. American playwright Aaron Posner –

who joins such distinguished *Seagull* adaptors as Tennessee Williams and Tom Stoppard – answers that charge by simply blowing the whole thing up and starting from scratch.

Judging from Dave Horak's lively production for his indie Edmonton Actors Theatre at the Backstage Theatre of the ATB Financial Arts Barns through March 12, the playwright scraped off the gathered moss and went back to the Russian master's basic relationships and original intentions while putting a modern spin on it all.

The actors frequently pause the action to address us directly, in speech and in song. It's far beyond the Shakespearian aside as performers unburden themselves to the audience, even to soliciting advice on what to do next. They acknowledge that their emotionally chaotic lives are happening within the boundaries of a theatre piece.

The result is a contemporary meditation on the durable and oft-produced 121-year-old classic. The title Posner has affixed to his adaptation is a clue to its sassy modernity. Consider the opening lines. An actor looks at the audience and demands, "Say, 'Start the fucking play!'" and waits until we do – and then the play begins.



**Posner and Horak, with their contemporary embellishments, move more closely to Chekhov's original comic intent by heightening the comedy while not falling into the trap (that many others have) of taking Chekhov at his word and turning the play into a farce. Or an arch melodrama.**

*Stupid Fucking Bird* taps into the best of both worlds. It is irreverent but not derisive. The production tells us what apparently Chekhov was getting at: Life sucks. In fact, Posner's characters say it several times in the play. As Chekhov intended, we laugh at these profoundly self-oriented people cast ashore in a bleak world of their own making and then suddenly our hearts are in our throats as the play blazes with genuinely Chekhovian bursts of emotion. Posner's writing is brilliant.

Conrad (Mat Simpson) is a frustrated young playwright staging a performance of his latest work. It's a site specific event – "it's a lot like a play, but not so stupid" – for his aging gorgon of a movie star mother, Emma (Melissa Thingelstad). She has come home for a visit with her new lover, the author Doyle (Ian Leung). Conrad is obsessed with the star of his show, the dewey young actress Nina (Zoe Glassman) but then Doyle also becomes smitten by her youthful beauty. Nina, overcome by his maturity and genius, surrenders to him. Simpson's fiery Conrad

is your basic tortured artist – so tightly wound and obsessed he is in danger of exploding at any second. Leung is slyly sure of himself and in control until Nina exposes herself to him and he loses it completely. Glassman is effectively unsure of herself at first but knows what she wants and how to get it. Thingelstad's Emma is a lioness in winter commanding (as she has all her life) everyone around her. They are supported by Ben Stevens, Paula Humby and Robert Benz. I say "supporting" but there are no throwaway performances in this superb show.

It's all played out in Stephanie Bahniuk's ingenious set – which is a long alley between the audience, split in two on either side. At one end of the stage is an exploded image of Chekhov on a series of boxes – at the other, stylized representations of the birch trees without which no Chekhov play would be complete.

**Horak's production is zestful, fast and funny and his efforts to turn Chekhov's Russian melancholy into a modern expression of the more cynical attitudes of our time is unfailingly successful – although traditionalists might disagree.**

The ending comes as a complete surprise – especially to anyone who is familiar with the original. But it plays so right and so contemporary that if Anton were writing today I'm sure he would have thought of it himself.

Photos by Nanc Price

## Here's a Chekhovian regret for you: Stupid Fucking Bird is gone

Posted on March 13, 2017

by Liz Nicholls



Cast of Stupid Fucking Bird, Edmonton Actors Theatre. Photo by Mat Simpson.

Haven't you ever watched yourself and got the vague feeling you're a spectator in your own life instead of a participant? Or maybe a fictional character in something kind of meandering and plotless instead of something that gets you happier?

Chekhov is there for you, my friend. And *Stupid Fucking Bird*, Aaron Posner's contemporary re-imagining of (and homage to) Chekhov's *The Seagull* really has your back. I **saw the last performance Sunday of Dave Horak's terrific Edmonton Actors Theatre production (which will sound like I'm just rubbing it in here if you missed it). But I can't stop thinking about its uncanny insights into our frantic quest for mutual love, human connection,**

**sustainable happiness — in all its absurdities. And the way we never stop feeling like we're outside looking in, thwarted at every turn.**

In fact, Con, Posner's version of *The Seagull's* Constantin — an aspiring playwright burning with frustration at the conventional in theatre — says "thwarted" over and over, in every possible permutation and combination, till the word loses all sense and becomes a goofy sound effect.

*Stupid Fucking Bird*, in a cheeky retrofit of the Chekhov, is the world seen through Con's eyes; he's a thwarted character in this, his own play. And he stands outside to chat with us directly, asking for pointers on how to win the love of the elusive Nina (Zoe Glassman), an up-and-coming actor in love with the idea of her own fame. In fact, the play starts with Con telling us it isn't going to start till someone says "start the fucking play." And he waits till one of us does just that. Mat Simpson is absolutely compelling, start to finish.

In *Stupid Fucking Bird*, a title that strikes exactly the right note of sass and exasperation, is all about the absurdity of criss-crossed arrows of desire. Why don't the right people love you back when you love them so intensely? Mash, played with amusingly pitch-perfect acid-tinged ennui by Paula Humby — her whole body can do one of those skeptical eye-rolls — is so smitten by Con she barely has time for the eager, friendly Dev (Ben Stevens) who's besotted by her. At moments of extreme frustration, she takes to the ukulele and sings hilariously bleak ditties of her own device: "you're hot, you rot, and then you're done/ And where's the part of this that's fun...." That sort of thing.

Dev's unflinching attempts at hopefulness are consistently funny and touching, as Steven delivers them. He tries so hard; he's thwarted so regularly. He's the one who tries to let Con down gently, but is too forthright not to tell him the truth. Will Nina ever love Con? Well, no.

**Melissa Thingelstad is tremendously funny as Emma, the play's Arkadina, famous grande dame actress, queen of the flamboyant ego, aware of her audience at every second. Thingelstad's creation knows that noblesse oblige is merely a theatrical ruse.** She sees through herself but carries on in spirited fashion anyway, just because it tickles her to be an Artist. And her relationship with her equally famous writer lover, played with worldly authority by Ian Leung in another of the play's fine comic performances, has every kind of nuance of power and vulnerability.

In this crowd of theatre people and writers, the only character who isn't an artist is a doctor (Robert Benz). And he's been foiled, not by love or God but by time. Pushing 60 and bemused by the frantic disappointments around him, he mixes himself a cocktail and muses that he wants to be 27 again. "I think I'm ready to do my late 20s really well now...."

**I loved the mixture of ruthless upward mobility and fragility in Glassman's Nina, who comes onto Trigorin relentlessly, gets her man and chance at stardom, and gets discarded by both in turn. Horak gets sharp, very funny and rueful, naturally detailed performances from all his actors.**

Stephanie Bahniuk, who should be getting snapped up by theatre companies across town, designs a frankly fake bucolic space with astroturf, the classic Chekhov birch trees as playing areas, and an abstract wall of domestic cubbyholes.

**It was a great show. I hope you saw it. And if you didn't, now's your moment to sample a Chekhovian regret for missed opportunity.**

# Everybody Footloose in Marvellous MacEwan musical

Posted on February 9, 2017 By Colin MacLean Entertainment, Front Slider, Theatre



Sorry, all of you who fondly remember the 1984 film Footloose as a quintessential part of your teen years – it really wasn't much of a movie. No one expected much from it. And who was this kid, Kevin Bacon, anyway?

Anyone who knew about those things was surprised when a whole generation of restless teens took it to heart. It grossed \$80 million at the box office and even made noises at both the Oscars and Golden Globes. The soundtrack knocked Michael Jackson's Thriller off the top of the charts and Kenny Loggins' earworm theme remains evergreen.

It's safe to say that not much was expected of Footloose: The Musical either when, in 1998, it hoofed its way onto a Broadway stage. And, indeed, critics were not kind. But what do critics know? They didn't like the movie, either. In fact, when the band strikes up Loggins' familiar opening chords in this lively and tuneful

new production from the MacEwan Theatre Arts Program, I suspect there will be few in the audience who will not feel a thrill of nostalgia.

Creators Dean Pitchford and Walter Bobbie avoided the boredom that crushed the stage musical version of that other teen favourite, Dirty Dancing, by goosing up the story, keeping the best songs from the original – Let's Hear It For The Boy, Almost Paradise, and Bonnie Tyler's enduring anthem Holding Out For a Hero – and a clutch of serviceable if not memorable new songs from tunesmith Tom Snow. The movie, which was more of an MTV video, just ran in the songs. The stage show uses them to advance character and plot.

**The result is a playful, energetic and enjoyable evening that should entertain just about everyone.**



For those who spent those years in a cult in Peru, the plot has big city boy Rea (Cameron Chapman) and his mother (Jeannine Naboye) relocating after a marriage failure to the sleepy middle-America small town of Bomont. Here he hooks up with the local nerd (and convenient comic relief) Willard (Malachi Wilkins). The kids of Bomont live under the iron hand of the overbearing Rev. Moore (Benjamin Oomen), who has banned dancing in an attempt to exercise control over the town's youth – a control he lost when his son, filled with booze and drugs, drove off a bridge and died five years before. Ren attempts to bring his wayward big city moves to the now rebellious local kids, but soon runs into the formidable Reverend in a battle for hearts and minds – and feet. The kids push back in their spirited fight for the freedom to dance as they test the boundaries of parental control.

Of course, love blossoms along with all that gettin' down and gettin' dirty as Ren falls for the local sparkplug (and daughter of Rev. Moore) the vivacious Ariel (Danica Kobayashi). The two able actors effectively raise the hormonal level of the whole production. The lanky Wilkins is a real find. Speaking in his best Jeff Foxworthy deep fried drawl, he's funny, right down to the way he moves. His comic song Mama Says is the high point of the show. Women's preacher is effectively conflicted and when he finally locates his inner Travolta and breaks into an uninhibited dance, the wildly partisan audience cheered mightily.

**The show starts at an energetic clip with the title song and some athletic and precise dancing from the 22 member cast (under the direction of choreographer Jacqueline Pooke).** Perhaps a bit too precise because for much of the first act, performances and dancing lacked the one thing the show champions – a sense of danger. By the time they got to their knockout delivery of Holding Out For a Hero, late in the first act, it was in the wind and by the second act they nailed it. The reprise of Footloose at the end was a barn burner.

If you are looking for a more profound meaning in the midst of all this rebellion and rock, Footloose “celebrates the wisdom of listening to young people and guiding them with a warm heart and open mind,” as the playbill reads.

And, of course, the curative and liberating powers of rock 'n' roll.

Footloose: The Musical plays in the John L. Haar Theatre through February 18.

## 70 Scenes of Halloween



Edmonton Journal,  
Liz Nicholls

There won't be a stranger show at the Fringe than **70 Scenes of Halloween**. This trick and treat is the latest offering from Dave Horak's Edmonton Actors Theatre, attracted as always to playful experiments with theatricality. "Scene 1. Go!" calls the director. Later the order will be more random, 15 comes after 22, 40 is preceded by 67. And it doesn't seem to matter much; nothing is caused and things just happen. The

scene is recognizable: A living room lit by the eerie glow of the TV, a couch with a man (Clinton Carew) on it. He's watching telly on Halloween night, hollering to his wife (Elena Porter) in the kitchen about snacks. She can't hear him. **This macabre and oddly mesmerizing '90s concoction by Jeffrey M. Wright, a hit for Chicago's Neo-Futurists, doesn't develop. Instead it has repeating riffs.** Snatches of familiar couples dialogue detach from their real-life moorings and return over and over, with adjustments and variations both minute and grotesque. Instead of "drama," think serial jazz instead, Steve Reich or John Cage with their hypnotic loops. Since it's Halloween the doorbell keeps ringing ("I'll get it!"). Candy-corn is invoked. Mysterious boxes appear on the coffee table. There's a knife but it's dull. One couple turns into two (Michaela Demeo and Gabriel Gagnon), identically dressed, who might be friends, or younger doubles. A wolf or a witch appears at the window, or comes to the door or out of the closet. You hear "help! lemme outta here!" or "feed me!" from the closet. Ghosts float by. You hear the classic couple's exchange "I'm in here!" "Where's here?" as the tone edges into irritation then exasperation, then subsides into uninflected delivery in another scene. Some scenes happen in assorted types of declamatory poetry. **It's at the intersection of the endlessly repeating routine and the barely masked unknown that marriages unspool. Men become wolves, women witches and their partners barely notice. Hey, it's a relationship play! The fun of 70 Scenes is that performances from Horak's four-member cast Dave Horak, especially Carew and Porter, establish such a convincing reality to play against. And the masks are startling.**

• 4 stars

### Gig City, Colin MacLean

You might not find much laughter in the Edmonton Actor's Theatre production of Jeffrey M. Jones' **70 Scenes of Halloween (BYOV 17)**. In fact, you might find this head-scratcher not funny at all. **It turns theatre conventions on their head while presenting a quartet of recognizable characters who seem perfectly at home in a world turned upside down. I found the play witty and inventive.**

**The production, directed with gleeful disregard for common sense or the time-space continuum by Dave Horak, finds Jeff (Clinton Carew) and Joan (Elena Porter) sitting disinterestedly watching television. They carry on the sort of bored, non-communicative conversations married people often fall into. Horak, the infernal master of ceremonies shouts "Scene**

2” and sets in motion a series of short events that may take place on Halloween, but are much more about Jeff and Joan. There is a new Jeff and Joan (who are really the old Jeff and Joan) played by Gabriel Gagnon and Michaela Demeo. In a classic scene of disconnected connection, as the two shout at each other from opposite ends of the house, frightful Halloween characters appear at the window. No, not kids in dress-up, but actual werewolves, ghosts and witches. Soon everything is all mixed up – creatures, couples and coherence. You might find two werewolves watching TV while a ghost dances about the room. All the while the hypnotic voice of the demonic director interrupts the short scenes with orders to begin a new one. Some are hilarious, some poetic, one is rendered in iambic pentameter, others are quite scary. There are moments of marital bliss and one quite graphic murder. Not that the victim will stay dead.

**Horak is helped considerably by the fact that his quartet of actors could read from your iPhone instruction booklet and make it sound interesting. They don't have much time, but the real humanity they bring to the characters grounds the whole exercise in a whacked reality.** The stories may be similar but the perspectives are radically askew. All of this could come off as a humourless experiment in absurdist avant-garde, but **Horak directs with a light, inventive hand and his adroit cast works to give each anecdote its own interior life.** It's not too hard to see the entire nightmare evening as an extension of Jeff and Joan's failing marriage.

4 out of 5 stars

## Teatro's tour of the galaxy conjures the heirs to the '60s with affection

Liz Nichols, Edmonton Journal. Published on June 27, 2016

“Too confining, too needful,” declares the nutty Manhattan bag lady who leads The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe as its narrator and muse. Creative consultant to gelatinous aliens on an earthly research mission, Trudy is talking about reality: It's over-rated. She argues it's “the leading cause of stress amongst those in touch with it ... Going crazy was the best thing that ever happened to me.”



Reality may be nothing more than “a collective hunch,” as Trudy proposes at the outset. But it makes for a vivid target on the human galaxy tour of this spiralling group portrait of a generation.

The play was created in the '80s specially for Lily Tomlin by her satirist partner Jane Wagner. **Thirty years later, crazy Trudy is back as our tour guide, in a Dave Horak production that unleashes the impressively protean and inventive actor Stephanie Wolfe on this witty portraiture of the anxious heirs of the '60s.**

With ease and affection, Wolfe conjures the wired and the bored, the earnest and the furious, the disappointed and the burnt-out. In her agile transformations, we see hippie hopes and socialite ennui, self-help freak-out and residual American dream fallout, consciousness-raising and expectation-lowering. It's from a period when, as one harried character laments, it was

getting “hard to be politically conscious and upwardly mobile at the same time.” Period piece The Search may be, but when did that stop being true?

Satire lives in detail, in retail allusions and precise turns of phrase. It’s startling to see the contemporary parallels in Wagner’s shivs at, say, meditation, progressive-parenting, middle-class faux bohemianism, or, arghhh, Donald Trump. Ah, or post-feminism. Doesn’t our own post-post (or possibly post-post-post) feminism take us back to the heart of something to be found in this play? We all know a Bob, for example, whose feminist credentials are so impeccable he knows where he was when Sylvia Plath died.

At first the characters we meet are connected only by the fact that Trudy’s hot-wired circuitry is doing a hook-up for the benefit of her “space chums.” It’s an artificial device, flirting with cuteness, that only gains by the production’s judicious trimming. Then, as the characters are set in motion by Wolfe’s quicksilver inventiveness, links gradually begin to appear.

In Act II, a virtuoso solo showcase of random portraiture becomes a play. Mainly we follow the mixed fortunes, marital, romantic and professional, of three women friends, sharing consciousness- and child-raising from the ’60s to the ’80s. And that’s where the appealing warmth of Wolfe’s performance really shines, as she conjures Lyn, struggling valiantly to have a marriage, kids, career AND an expanded mind in a world of shrinking options. Wolfe conjures a dozen sharply delineated characters via precise readjustments of voice, gesture, expression, body language. We meet Chrissy, the vaguely aspirational underachiever who reveals, while doing aerobics, that “I’ve always wanted to be somebody. But I see now I should have been more specific.”

We meet the jaded socialite matron who has read that you can actually die of boredom. There’s snarly 15-year-old punk artiste Agnus Angst, who has nothing in common with her family “except we are all carbon-based life forms.” Wolfe is unfailingly convincing, and the transformations are magic. It’s Trudy, though, the crusty street sage and architect of the play’s framework, who brings us back to the fact that The Search was custom-made for the particular talents and tics of rubber-faced Tomlin. Wolfe’s comic agility notwithstanding, you do get a bit tired of Trudy’s cute quirkiness and Tomlinesque grimaces, in truth, though the character is armed with a witty arsenal of Wagner’s comic one-liners.

**Under Horak’s direction, the search happens in a translucent world, designed and lighted by Stephanie Bahniuk, across which projections of urban life (designed by Matt Schuurman) flicker and float. It’s a beautifully minimalist production in its visuals; images insinuate themselves and disappear, just the way the characters do, on the stage of the newly reconstructed Varscona.**

**It’s theatrically astute.** The final thought presses its luck just a little — a testament to the power of live performance to give Trudy’s aliens a major “goose bump experience.” But as an ode to the communal shared theatrical experience, it gives you a quiver of delight when you’re in a new theatre with an actor as engaging as Wolfe. Come to think of it, if you’re searching for signs of intelligent life, theatre might well be the place to start.

# Edmonton première of Burning Bluebeard a poignant mix of comedy and horror

Liz Nichols, Edmonton Journal. Published on: December 7, 2015



**There's a sweet and crazy magic about the holiday show that's currently running at Theatre Network's Roxy on Gateway. Sweet and crazy and weird.** Burning Bluebeard has everything a Christmas pantomime should have: a fairy tale with a fairy godmother and a fairy aerialist, vaudevillian banter, a star comedian with proudly mouldy jokes, contemporary throw-aways, a sassy harlequin, a smidge of cross-dressing, repartee with the audience, festive presents, pop-music numbers with lip-synching, dance interludes ... body bags.

What? Yes, I feel confident in saying this will undoubtedly be the only entertainment of the Yule season that opens with the characters emerging from body bags, all smudgy and charred.

Jay Torrence's play even has history and a terrible real-life tragedy. It happened on Dec. 30, 1903 in Chicago's glittering new Iroquois Theatre, at the sold-out matinee of the panto Mr. Bluebeard, an amusingly gruesome Brit import with iffy reviews. A spark from the lovely Act II moon hanging above the stage, in cahoots with shoddy wiring, caught the drapes on fire. In the ensuing inferno 600 people died; with one exception they were all members of the audience.

Which explains why the ghostly cast has arrived before us, with a store of morbid cracks about "the hottest show in town" and "a finale that really does bring the house down." Ah yes, and they're carrying the guilty knowledge that their sacred contractual obligation to provide a happy ending has been violated. After all, "a good show doesn't kill you to see it," says the stage manager (John Ulyatt). "You know how when you go to a Christmas show and you're sitting there and it doesn't catch you on fire?" he asks. "We did the opposite of that."

From the smoking ashes of the past, they're here to finish their panto cut short by flames and mass death. As you might imagine, this swirl of hype and hopefulness, macabre black humour and bona fide tragedy makes for a highly unusual tone. In its first outing outside Chicago — where Burning Bluebeard has been an annual seasonal tradition since its 2011 première by the experimental Neo-Futurists — **Jay Torrence's post-panto panto gets a crack production from Edmonton Actors Theatre, directed by Dave Horak.**

**You won't have seen anything quite like this mixture of horror, comedy and poignance, with its lively affection for the art of theatre and the magic of theatrical illusions and their diligent perpetrators.** And an excellent ensemble, led by Amber Lewis as the tart-tongued harlequin, zestfully embraces the strangeness of it, the fleeting mimed scenes from Mr. Bluebeard, the annotations, the impulse to give something memorable to the audience in exchange for the risk.

As the cheerful fairy aerialist, who has come to the big city from far away, Stephanie Wolfe is delightful. Really, so are they all. Braydon Dowler- Coltman is the amusingly wholesome and earnest young actor whose task is to play the title villain; he reasons, with the typical actorly analysis that Bluebeard is merely "misunderstood." Vincent Forcier is sharp and funny as Eddie Foy, the turn-of-the-century vaudeville star who's the headliner.

As the troubled stage manager, Ulyatt does the most memorable lipsynch of Amy Winehouse's Rehab you're ever going to see. And Richelle Thoreson of Toy Guns Dance Theatre (also the choreographer) is the tiny, shimmering Fairy Queen who dispenses magical fireflies in a jar, as she dances, silently smiling, through the show.

The destruction of Edmonton's own Roxy Theatre by fire about a year ago gives special poignance to the thought that a theatre is a place haunted by voices, words and memories. That's what the characters tell us at the outset, as we're welcomed to the scorched and shadowy "Eery- Coy Theatre," rendered with poetic aptness by designer Scott Peters, whose lighting effects are inspired.

**And unlikely as it may seem, since we know how horrifically Mr. Bluebeard ended, there's a kind of innocent beauty to the conjuring act that brings a long-dead show to life. "We might get it right this time," one character proposes. Somehow, amazingly, they do.**

## **Burning Bluebeard innovative and energetic**

BY COLIN MACLEAN, EDMONTON SUN  
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 04, 2015

Now here's an unexpected gift under the Christmas Tree. No nutcrackers, presents or even a red nosed reindeer here. It's a celebration (observance?) of all things theatrical - and one of the most terrible tragedies of the 20th century.

On December 30th, 1903 Chicago's new state-of-the-art theatre, The Iroquois, caught fire. The place was packed — overloaded in fact. The doors were locked (so people wouldn't sneak in). The new asbestos curtain that was to protect the audience never deployed. Over 600 hundred people, mostly women and children, died in the worst single building fire in American history.

**This production of Jay Torrence's Burning Bluebeard comes from Edmonton Actors Theatre who in 2015 gave us Fat Boy a gloriously cynical, politically incorrect, commedia dell'arte view of, um, a portly fellow who becomes king of the world (King Turd) and demands the assassination of everyone. Despite (or perhaps because of) the subject matter — it was hilarious.**



The first production of *Burning Bluebeard* (based on the title of the original 1903 panto, *Mr. Bluebeard*), was in 2011 by a Chicago modernist troupe called the Neo-Futureists. It turned out to be a hit and it's been produced every year since on the anniversary of the fire.

The production imagines what “the show they never gave” might have looked like. The original cast, wracked by guilt because they mostly all lived through the fire, returns to the (Scott Peters' impressively charred) stage. The air is filled with smoke, the costumes scorched and covered with soot. They are presenting the show in hopes that, somehow, *Groundhog Day*-like, the result will be different.

Torrence's macabre cabaret is an elaborate bouquet of show business styles and tropes: vaudeville turns, modern pop songs, heartfelt monologues, lip synch, acrobatics and (of course) cheap Icelandic techno music. The characters are based on real people including Eddie Foy, one of the reigning vaudeville kings of the day and star of the show, who tried to calm the audience while their world was burning up around them. The show positively revels in gallows humour. “You know when you go to most Christmas shows and you're sitting there and they don't catch you on fire?” inquires one of the characters. “Well, we did the opposite of that.”

This is the sort of thing that could get quickly tiresome but **Dave Horak's gung-ho, give-'er-all, unendingly innovative production is constantly jolted with theatrical energy from a company of much-talented performers: Braydon Dowler- Coltman, Vincent Forcier, Amber Lewis, Richelle Thoreson, John Uilyatt and Stephanie Wolfe. They all have their moments and they all shine.**

Despite the **irreverent wit and rolling laughter that often convulses the audience**, historically speaking, there will be no happy ending. You know what's coming and when the conflagration does, with its staggering horror, it's brilliantly staged and emotionally powerful. Words fail and the enormity can only be expressed in dance (choreography by Richelle Thoreson). “We just wanted to create something beautiful,” muses one performer - hopeful that the magic of theatre can somehow undo the inevitable tragedy.

Well, wait for it.

At the end, beauty still slumbers under the ashes.

# Fatboy

## Edmonton actors take on absurdist theatre

BY COLIN MACLEAN, EDMONTON SUN, September 2014



Alfred Jarry was a French avant-guard playwright, whose magnum opus *Ubu Roi* opened (and closed) in one night in December of 1896. It's a wild, bizarre satire of power, violence and greed as broad as the Champs-Elysees.

With this play, Jarry is credited with having invented absurdist theatre.

It's probably still unproducibile in its original form but directors are drawn to the play - the themes are certainly as valid today as they were over 100 years ago and it's highly theatrical. The latest is *Fatboy* a 2006 rewrite by American playwright John Clancy. His version is part white-faced commedia dell'arte and part circus - all served up with lashings of cynicism.

Fatboy, who has declared himself King (the original title meant "King Turd"), gets very serious when money is mentioned. "Money," he says, "what about art, beauty and truth?" (long pause) Then the entire cast breaks into hysterical laughter. That bit serves as a running gag throughout the production.

There may not be much in the way of gracious beauty in this remount of the Edmonton Actors Theatre earlier hit, but there is considerable art. It's truck is truth but dispatched at a breakneck pace and lathered with slapstick.

Also at a high decibel level. Indeed you wonder, because they are both way out there at the powerhouse end of their vocal projection, if leads Frederick Zbryski and Melissa Thingelstad will be able to last to the end of the run - or, for that matter, to the end of evening. **This is a cast (under director Dave Horak's knockabout guidance) that gets it, knows where the laughs are and keeps a vehicle that could wear out its welcome fairly fast, bubbling away for an hour and twenty minutes.**

Clancy's adaptation is gloriously and baroquely foulmouthed, using profanity as punctuation until the weirdly theatrical use of the familiar words begins to sound almost like poetry. At the beginning Fatboy (Zbryski in a fatsuit) is an insatiable creature - he literally eats money when he brings it home after a day of murder and robbery. His wife, Fudgie, is equally rapacious using sex (judging from

what we hear off-stage loud and uninhibited sex) as a cudgel. Later Fatboy is hauled before a court of law where he buys the obviously willing judge.

In the last act, Fatboy becomes ruler of the world and demands that everyone (and possibly himself?) is killed. Others in the rambunctious cast include Mathew Hulshof, Ian Leung and Tim Cooper.

**This is not a place to look for subtlety but it is great fun and fiercely funny.**

## Theatre review: Fatboy at the Roxy so funny it's exhausting

BY LIZ NICHOLLS, EDMONTON JOURNAL SEPTEMBER 19, 2014



EDMONTON - For a newly vivid and graphic definition of chewing the scenery, repair at once to Fatboy, currently opening the Roxy Performance Series at Theatre Network with nary a half-measure in sight. There you will see a murderous, ranting, megalomaniacal, endlessly vicious, insatiably rapacious despot — “I am Fatboy and I an titular!” — actually eat part of his own chair and tuck into his crown.

Here's the thing about John Clancy's scoriating satire of our ruthless appetite for destruction and consumption, a re-imagining of Alfred Jarry's prescient 1896 satire *Ubu Roi*: Fatboy not only doesn't know when to say when, it dismisses the entire concept of the half-measure as so much risible liberal lint in the navel of the body politic, and then stomps on it. And screams with laughter.

Dave Horak's crack production, returning in enhanced, fully-staged form with the original cast of its 2012 Fringe incarnation, embraces the spirit of relentless offensiveness with a

buzz-saw scatological zest that will make it fun, in fleeting moments of introspection, to review the list of people you can't possibly take to the show. Start with die-hard disciples of political correctness or, indeed, moderation of any kind, and include people who say “shoot!” and “my land!” at moments of maximum stress.

**Director Horak stages his more-is-more Edmonton Actors Theatre production as a sort of vaudeville of clown grotesques, on a wonky old-fashioned stage (designer: Scott Peters) with a red-velvet curtain that's seen better days. It's a veritable human Punch and Judy puppet theatre, with highly amusing costumes (by Melissa Cuerrier) and precisely choreographed violence (by Leah Paterson) to match.**

And the actors —led by Fred Zbryski and Melissa Thingelstad as Fatboy and his consort Fudgie, are monstrously entertaining as the outsized characters. Zbryski, ensconced in an epically pneumatic fat suit, creates a vivid portrait of all-consuming self gratification — at a volume that may well be some sort of torture-test for the limits of the human voice in a 75-minute show. “You're a shouty person,” observes the judge (the very funny Ian Leung) mildly at his war crimes trial. “Shouty, shouty! ... I love that in a defendant; it gives the illusion of drama.” And Zbryski adds to those, er, pounding top-notes, a certain air of put-upon exasperation that is droll.

Fatboy may be a raging homicidal maniac, but he has grievances, poor lad; he never quite gets his due, despite the sweet reasonableness of his requests — whether he's roaring for pancakes, or insisting on better lighting at his trial, or ordering his lackey to “go out and kill everything and then kill yourself when you're done.”

Thingelstad is riotous as the tigerish, grossly venal Fudgie, “the brains of this outfit” by her own admission, who bites off insults with a razor precision. She does have a certain lingering fondness for her

rampaging hubbie; you can tell by her terms of endearment, of which “you pig! fat disgusting monster!” are among the only printable.

Fudgie makes a certain effort, from time to time, to camouflage her cannibalistic appetites with flirtatiousness. And Thingelstad makes of that fleeting tension a juicy comic possibility. Mathew Hulshof, as the randy gentleman boarder who “kills people for money,” is very funny, too, posing seductively by doorways and whipping off his pants at the earliest convenience. Later, he will ask to be excused from Fatboy’s trial, so he can go offstage and change costume, because he’s double-cast. Fatboy is playfully theatrical that way. As the randy prosecutor and Fatboy’s glum slave, Tim Cooper rises to the occasion, too. Relentlessness can be tiring, by definition. But since Fatboy’s chosen subject is, actually, relentlessness and excess, it’s harder to object — except to say that Fatboy flirts with outstaying its welcome.

Fatboy takes an even bigger chance by having an overt denouement, with a kind of nail-pounding overt explanation. What happens when our hero has actually consumed everything in the world? Is Fatboy eternal? What if he walks among us?

**It’s all a bit much; it’s all a bit tiring. And it’s hilarious**

## THE BOMB-ITTY OF ERRORS



### VUE WEEKLY

A self-described “ad-rap-tation,” this is an irreverent hip-hop reimagining of Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors*. It’s likely to polarize devotees of the Bard’s work—I could see arguments for both sides—but hey: ol’ Bill had to have possessed a pretty good sense of humour to write the source material in the first place. Props must be given to the quartet of performers for skillfully navigating through the tongue-twisting script, which is laden with colloquialisms and crass vernacular blended with the odd foray into iambic pentameter. There’s also some truly hilarious cross-dressing—Shakespeare would definitely approve. **Overall this is a raucous, high-spirited show with some really catchy musical numbers.** —Mel Priestley

### THE BOMB-ITTY OF ERRORS

The Bomb-itty of Errors takes two of the most intimidating forms of writing — Shakespeare and rap — and transforms them into a **laugh-riot of hip-hop beats, Yo Mama disses, and enough costume changes to make Cher green with envy.**

There’s no easy way to explain the plot in 200 words or less. It’s a convoluted tale, based on Shakey’s *The Comedy of Errors*, about two sets of identical twins, mistaken identity, and what seems like a never-ending list of spurned/insulted men and women, including an uppity wife, her airhead sister, a jeweller and a cop with a bad case of gas.

Fortunately, Bomb-itty’s crew of MCs, Khiry Tafari, iD, Scott Shpeley and KazMega, make it relatively painless to follow along as the intricate story unfolds. The latter two tend to steal the show, especially as their female alter-egos: Shpeley as Adriana, the uppity (and hairy) wife; KazMega as Luciana, the blond-wigged airhead sister.

Friday's production, soundtracked by DJ Baggylean, was marred by a few technical glitches and forgotten or flubbed lines, but **you could sense there's a five-star performance waiting to burst out of these guys.** - Sandra Sprounes

## EURYDICE



**VUE**  
WEEKLY

**Lyre, Lyre - Eurydice a touching meditation on communication**

**Paul Blinov**

Eurydice's framework is the Greek myth of Orpheus—the man who sung his way down to the underworld to attempt a rescue of his love—but playwright Sarah Ruhl's reinterpretation seems less of a tragic moral fable and more an inquisition into the ways we communicate with the people we love. Or the ways we don't; the language we use, the important things we say or hold back or the struggle to express are what really emerge from this script in equal parts beauty and tragedy. **David Horak's MFA production does it tender justice.**

It's fairly well-known, but told with fresh point of view: on the day Eurydice (Beth Graham) is to wed Orpheus, her father (Michael Peng) writes her a letter from the underworld. It finds its way to the surface but into the hands of a self-aggrandizing Interesting Man (Matthew Hulsof), and during her efforts to retrieve the note, Eurydice tumbles from his high rise and ends up in the elevator down to the afterlife. It's not hell, but it's hardly humane.

Washed clean of memory and words—the dead, we're told, speak in the "very quiet" language of stones—she's adrift, but her Father (skillfully played by the always watchable Michael Peng) finds her, and that's where Eurydice's script departs from direct storytelling to a dreamy curiosity: a house is constructed out of an umbrella and string. Books get stood upon, their "readers" seemingly hopeful of absorbing their content like trees would water. The Lord of the Underworld acts like a brat and rides a tricycle while metal music blares. It's an odd world, but one that makes sense while you're watching it.

Designer Jennifer Goodman's graywashed set is full of little technical surprises, bending to the whims of its world with ease, and Horak's direction keeps the action moving along, while giving time to let us discover this world as the characters do.

Here, as her father begins to coax her out of being a walking corpse and back to a proper person, while Orpheus attempts to make contact from above, we start to see the way communication twists and tangles: "You know how much I hate writing letters," an exasperated Orpheus whines from above, eventually winning his way down to his bride without words but

pure emotional sounds, which he can't seem to put into words when he's with her, while her father instructs, giving her back language and with it memory. Dialogue would be crucial, but it seems like the one thing each of these characters is unable to have with the other is a conversation about what each really means to the other.

Eurydice's fate is decided by a single word, spoken not with certainty but panic, an emotional spill she struggles to explain in its aftermath, but instinctively let slip out. You probably know the ending, but the script doesn't dwell on its own inherent tragedy. Instead, Eurydice sculpts a mood made to linger long after the curtain falls.

## EURYDICE

**Modern retelling of Orpheus, Eurydice myth satisfying**

COLIN MACLEAN, EDMONTON SUN  
FIRST POSTED: SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2010



Watching **Dave Horak's absorbing production of Eurydice at Studio Theatre, you are reminded how fortunate we are to have the U of A players in this town.** Sara Ruhl's off-beat, modern retelling of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is not the sort of vehicle to attract commercial theatres but it is certainly an evening of many, often conflicting, but finally satisfying emotions.

The myth is of Eurydice - the beloved of the musician, Orpheus. While running through the woods she is bitten by a snake and descends to the underworld. The devastated Orpheus stands at the gates of Hades and sings so sweetly that the Lord of the Dead opens the gates on the promise that Orpheus will not look on his beloved until they are back in the world. But the smitten young man can't help himself, sneaks a peek, and Eurydice returns to the netherworld.

Ruhl's play (which saw very successful runs in New York and elsewhere) tells the story from Eurydice's point of view. She is marrying Orpheus but doesn't seem overcome by the idea. The two are quite different but she is willing to sacrifice her interests to his - which seems to include making music and not much else.

Seeking relief from the stuffy people at her wedding, she meets a faintly menacing Victorian dandy who invites her up to his penthouse where she enters a fatal elevator whose bottom floor is hell itself.

Meanwhile, in the underworld, a strange place with its own rhythms and textures (set design - Jennifer Goodman), her loving father has built an existence (if not a life) on memories of his daughter - to the extent that he goes, alone, through the wedding ceremony he will never see. When she appears, her memory gone, he slowly and lovingly recreates her past and in a very moving scene, builds her her own room out of an umbrella and string.

Theirs is the strong and loving relationship she never felt with Orpheus -who, of course, shows up to rescue her. As the two walk back toward the world, she reaches out and touches him (on purpose?). He turns and she returns to death.

Endeavouring to keep the mythic proportions of the story, **Ruhl often throws artificial and stylistic extremes at Horak of which the director takes full advantage. But he adroitly anchors his production in the strong, naturalistic acting of Beth Graham as Eurydice and Michael Peng as her Father. There is a genuine warmth between these two fine performers. Bryan D. Webb's Orpheus is not given a lot to work with but he is an ardent, if rather self-centred fellow, and Matthew Hulshof's two roles (Gentleman/Lord of the Underworld) are both menacing and comic.**

Ruhl and company are playing with some very big emotions here - the choices we have to make, the elemental place of love and loss in all our lives and the importance of remembering even with its often attendant remorse and pain.

## EURYDICE



See Magazine

Posted by ALISTAIR HENNING in SEEN & HEARD  
Sep 25th, 2010

I always thought the 'Orpheus' myth was pretty cheesy stuff. Don't get me wrong: I'm a romantic guy; the idea of a singer going down to hell and impressing the demons so much with his music that they're moved to let him take his beloved back to the world of the living sounds pretty cool.

But the ending, which I will presume is known to most people who've finished grade school, seemed pretty cheesy – though perhaps, as one of the ancient, archetypal Greek tragedies, that the story is over-the-top by contemporary standards should hardly be surprising. That's why inventive playwright and deserved McArthur Fellowship ('Genius') Award recipient Sarah Ruhl's nuanced reinvention of this much meditated-upon story is such a treat.

**Moving without being sad, Ruhl modernizes the myth not through an overabundance of contemporary references – the play is staged in modern dress but could be set anytime in the post-industrial (or at least, the post- Cole Porter) world**

**– but by opening up the core duo's personas. Crucially, Ruhl also adds a third dimension for exploring love and loss in the figure of Eurydice's father.**

While Ruhl has gone on to author many acclaimed plays in the near decade since she wrote this one, but Eurydice, which originally did so much to put her on the theatrical map, continues to grow in stature and multi-faceted richness by the year.

And in Studio Theatre's hands, Ruhl's masterpiece truly shines. Designer Jennifer Goodman's production is undoubtedly technically complex and certainly aesthetically engaging, **but working in concert with Dave Horak's skilled direction it enhances without overwhelming the ensemble's resonantly lyrical performances.**

Especially, Beth Graham carries the title role with a fleet pathos that seems to suit her, and Michael Peng, through both words and gestures, expresses so much of the feeling at the core of the myth's retelling here. **Horak and Goodman's Eurydice at Studio Theatre is a masterful**

**rendition of what is already shaping up to be a modern classic.** If you believe at all in the power of theatre to tackle the most relevant and personal of issues in a compelling yet accessible way – or, for that matter, you are looking for proof – look no farther than this production.