

THEATER REVIEW 'How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found' ★★

A total escape isn't in the cards

By Chris Jones
TRIBUNE CRITIC

I'd had such a rough week at the office, I was more than ready for a Friday night play offering pointers on how to vanish without a trace.

That's a tough assignment, of course, in our wired, networked, socially mediated world. But the hero of Fin Kennedy's "How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found," the latest show at the venerable Mary-Arrchie Theatre Company, gives it the old college try. Fair enough. Who hasn't fantasized about starting their life over again and making some better

When: Through Dec. 20

Where: Angel Island, 735, W. Sheridan Road

Running time: 2 hours, 10 minutes

Tickets: \$18-\$22 at 773-871-0442 or ticketweb.com

early decisions? In Kennedy's British play, the suggested technique goes roughly as follows: visit a graveyard, find the name of a dead person, get a copy of their publicly available

birth certificate, buy things in that name (using that document as ID), build up a new credit rating, get further forms of ID, start your new life. Oh, and never, ever go back to any element of your old one. However tempted.

Kennedy is one of Britain's hotter young writers, and you can see why people are interested in his work. This smart little play homes in on one of the central paradoxes of our massively interconnected world: There is so much interconnection, it starts to work against itself. Think about it. If so many computers are talking to each other about such minutiae, the pervasiveness of those conversations actually makes it easier to introduce falsehoods into the system. As I write, a credit card invitation for my 6-year-old son sits by my fingers. I rest my case.

When Kennedy is on that topic, I was compelled by his play. But when the action deviates from reality to the point where it appears the central character (played by nicely sardonic Carlo Lorenzo Garcia) is hanging around with the pathologist dissecting his body, and when that old metaphor of the lost property office makes yet another appearance, one's belief tends to fade. You could argue the splitting of reality is a logical extension of the writer's themes, but there have been many plays about middle-class guys ditching the daily grind (David Mamet's "Edmond" is one example), and Kennedy's overly jerky play tends to lose its freshness the further it diverts from the truth.

I winced when we're asked to believe that the central character seems to come to a painful realization that there is much fakery in the world. Guess his profession? Advertising. Surely, he's not just figuring that out.

Richard Cotovsky's well-paced and zesty Mary-Arrchie production is certainly in touch with the absurdist element of the play, but rather less in touch with its darker truths. At times, the ensemble cast — including Shannon Clausen, Scott Danielson, James Eldrenkamp, Kasia Januszewski, Kristina Johnson, Britni Tozzian and the excellent Kevin Stark — embraces the narrative like they're auditioning for an episode of "The Office," and, given the smallness of the space, the whole thing suffers from being slightly but consistently overplayed. And when you don't believe in the reality of life, you don't understand the urgency of a quick exit.

cjones5@tribune.com



Rebecca Prescott, from left, Nina O'Keefe and Barbara Roeder Harris star in "Democracy" with Stephen Dale.

THEATER REVIEW 'Democracy' ★★ 1/2

The more things change ...

Eclipse play digs into mismatched couples, political scandals

By Chris Jones
TRIBUNE CRITIC

Could you marry someone who does not share your basic values? It's a notion pondered by Democrats who fall in love with Republicans, or right-wing ideologues who find themselves with tender feelings for some beauteous equivalent on the left.

It's also the most interesting question pondered by the Romulus Linney play "Democracy," Linney's historical drama, in rare revival from the Eclipse Theatre Company, was penned in the 1970s and based on an 1880 novel. Its source was originally published anonymously but was later revealed to be the work of Henry Brooks Adams, an American writer and intellectual with strong family connections to the White House.

But Adams had turned his attention not to grandfather John Quincy Adams, but to the scandal-plagued administration of Ulysses S. Grant, the 18th president and an Ohioan who presided over a Washington, D.C., that could be mistaken for a scandal-and-gossip-plagued small town. *Plus ça change ...*

As dramatized by Linney, events focus on two women who fall in love with inappropriate men. The first woman whose heart betrays her head is Esther Dudley (the spunky Nina

When: Through Dec. 20

Where: Greenhouse Theater Center, 2257 N. Lincoln Ave.

Running time: 2 hours, 10 minutes

Tickets: \$25 at 773-404-7336

O'Keefe), the agnostic daughter of a Supreme Court justice and a kind of proto-bohemian who wears pants. She falls for a priest, the Rev. Hazard (Stephen Dale). That's a tough one.

The second is Madeleine Lee (the classy Rebecca Prescott), who attracts the attention of Sen. Silas Raitcliffe (Jon Steinhagen), a smart-but-sleazy senator from the State of Illinois (No way) with his fingers involved in any number of scandals, including the infamous Whiskey Ring, a conspiracy wherein various high-ranking pols were able to siphon off liquor taxes (No way). Should the widow marry this charmer?

Oscillating around this scandalous love-quartet are an out-of-their-league president and first lady (played by Ron Butts and Sandy Spatz), a notorious lobbyist (Cherri Chenoweth) and a sly Bulgarian minister (Larry Baldacci), moving the malleable pawns around. Linney conceived the whole yarn as a farce-within-a-farce, and Stephen Fedoruk's compact

production is lit by footlights.

If you are a fan of American presidential history, have recently ingested some caffeine, and like some woolly substance with your theater, you might well find this an intriguing drama. Be warned though, it takes a while for the viable dramatic core to emerge. Linney has never been known for getting straight to the point, and this production needs more pace.

Most certainly, though, it's tough to stage a full-on, large-cast, non-Equity, period drama in a tiny studio theater, and Eclipse mostly pulls it off, Chicago-style, with the significant help of some zesty costumes from designer Joshua Allard.

It's tough to find the right balance between honesty and farce with this script. But Steinhagen, a mischievous comic actor who livens up any period drama, is on hand to amuse when things threaten to sag.

And while truths are not always plumbed as deeply as one might wish — most specifically, I never saw what Esther saw in her overly childish priest — Fedoruk and his crowd of climbers and fallers all manage to walk that delicate line between satire and timeless Washingtonian observation.

cjones5@tribune.com

DANCE REVIEW

Cedar Lake's 'Duets' a harrowing drama

By Sid Smith
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

We've seen only two of her works so far, but Chicagoans are rapidly learning that Canada's Crystal Pite is an artistic tornado, a choreographer versatile in talent and fearless in imagination.

In June, Nederlands Dans Theater brought "The Second Person," a surreal spectacle with Kafkaesque dreamscapes and postmodern puppetry. This weekend, the great-looking, dynamite dancers of Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet brought a completely different instance of her aesthetics. "Ten Duets on a Theme of Rescue" is a harrowing drama, brilliantly shaped, that brings one noteworthy couple after another on stage for ultraintense interaction. Here, Pite is master of a more condensed, seemingly limited canvas — the interplay of two dancers. Yet the passion and uncanny fever of it pack a wallop far more discomfiting than any spectacle, however Kafkaesque.

Brilliantly lit by Jim French, the arena is a dark cavern of moving stage lights, and the dancers emerge from the background as if from a hellish mist. The tensions, mini-dramas and titular rescues are often awesome, including one of the men running in place in one stretch as if for his life.

Cedar Lake's fine program over the weekend at the Auditorium Theatre began with Norwegian Jo Stromgren's "Sunday, Again," a caustic comedy about sports-clad couples playing out relationships amid goof-ball images of badminton. Cheeky in humor, the work boasts Stromgren's inventive movement, suggestive here and there of Paul Taylor, albeit more somber.

Didy Veldman's "frame of view" makes haunting structural use of the



Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet members perform "Ten Duets on a Theme of Rescue."

three doors of its set. But Veldman ultimately tosses in too much — a serio-comic, slow-motion quarrel set to Jacques Offenbach, for instance — so that the rousing finish comes only after an interminable parade of indulgent dance vaudeville.

RECORDINGS

50 Cent sounds fired up with return to grittier era

50 Cent, 'Before I Self Destruct' ★★ (out of 4)



While amassing a \$400 million fortune that encompasses everything from vitamin drinks to condoms, 50 Cent (born Curtis Jackson III) has gone from a "shot-nine-times" thug to a hip-hop impresario, trading in his Kevlar vest for an Armani suit. But his sales have been sliding since "Get Rich or Die Tryin'" put him on the celebrity A-list in 2003. He has been trafficking in pop novelties

such as "Candy Shop" and "Amusement Park" ever since, a world removed from the hard-edged MC he once

was on mix tapes circulated in the hip-hop underground.

His fourth studio album, "Before I Self Destruct" (Aftermath/Interscope), aims to remind fans of that grittier era, before Eminem signed 50 Cent to a seven-figure record deal. The production, by the usual crop of heavy hitters (Dr. Dre, Lab Ox, The Bizness), is darker and heavier than anything on his recent albums, and the narratives draw on his drug dealer and gangbanger youth with a vividness reminiscent of those early street tapes. Even his fonder reminiscences are caked in sordidness, as he conjures up being seduced by his baby sitter in "Then Day Went By." The subject matter is anything but fresh ("I bring money to my [friends], death to my enemies"), but at least these tales of blood and dollars find him more fired up than he has been in years. His rhyme battle with Eminem on "Psycho" has zero redeeming value, but the two old pros fire away with glee trying to out-psychopath each other.

But about halfway through the album, 50 Cent detours from the street to the bedroom. He breaks out the cognac and cognac and turns on the charm, such as it is. With R. Kelly waxing scatological on the hook for "Could've Been You," his soft-core porn rhymes are as mechanical as bad phone sex. Talk about self-destructing.

—Greg Kot, Tribune Newspapers Critic

OneRepublic, 'Waking Up' ★★

A muscular, Timbaland-shaped shadow loomed over the unlikely success of OneRepublic's debut album, "Dreaming Out Loud." His inescapable remix of the band's single "Apologize" vaulted the group to multiplatinum sales and took frontman Ryan Tedder into the upper ranks of songwriting pens-for-hire in pop for Leona Lewis, Rihanna, Beyonce and many others.

Much of that record and Tedder's outside writing was a weak broth of dorm-room-canoodling ballads and R&B with very little rhythm or blues. Fortunately, on OneRepublic's second album, "Waking Up" (Mosley Music/Interscope), they've internalized a lot of the things that made Timbaland such a compelling producer — that good sounds are paramount, songs should move in odd directions and many different ideas can constitute a hook.

That's not to say "Waking Up" sounds anything like Aaliyah or Missy Elliott. But the filtered dubstep drum loops and the Afro-pop marimba of "Missing Persons 1 & 2" have a real playfulness. "Marchin' On" takes a backing vocal hook and writes a whole song around it. Even the overreaching piano musings like "All This Time" have a solo-McCartney goofy sweetness about them.

The band needs to stop mistaking the cello as an inherently "meaningful" instrument. But Timbaland should be proud; OneRepublic is using his old tricks even better than he is lately.

—August Brown, Special to Tribune Newspapers

Client Name:
Advertiser:
Section/Page/Zone: TEMPO/003/ALL
Description:
Ad Number:
Insertion Number:
Size:
Color Type:

Chicago Tribune
Publication Date: 11/16/2009

This electronic tearsheet confirms the ad appeared in The Chicago Tribune on the date and page indicated. You may not create derivative works, or in any way exploit or repurpose any content.