

props/costumes that litter the stage—could make the impact of the piece even stronger. (Sassafras Lowrey is the one billed collaborator, serving as production manager for the show.) Still, Lowrey's voice makes a vital contribution to an evolving understanding of gender, prods us to transcend labels of "freakishness," and reminds us that whether male, female, or transgender, under the clothes and the flesh we're all human.

Written/created by: Kestryl Cael Lowrey
Presented by Pomo Freakshow Productions

Buy tickets for this show:

Sat August 9 5:30 pm
Sun August 10 7:00 pm
Wed August 13 5:15 pm
Fri August 15 7:00 pm
Sat August 16 2:15 pm
Mon August 18 7:00 pm
Fri August 22 3:30 pm

Pawnshop Accordions

reviewed by **Julie Congress**
Aug 9, 2008

Everyday, a paranoid schizophrenic, an egg sandwich salesman, an EMT, and a mute gypsy accordionist sit around Port Authority. They are the residents of their own country, named Port Authoritas. Though perhaps a little dirty, a little crazy, and a little crooked, they are nonetheless a loving family of misfits. With time, they are joined by a washed-up journalist who never outgrew the '70s. The journalist wants to write an article about Zaida, the mysterious accordionist. Egg Sandwich wants to buy a real cart to sell his wares from. Roche the EMT wants to get an illegal birth certificate for his immigrant wife. And they all want, more or less, to be around one another.

The ensemble of *Pawnshop Accordions* is very, very strong. Brian D. Coats gives a

ripe for ridicule, but really what is the point? Anyone who reads an *AM New York* newspaper on the train once a week has heard all these jabs before.

The set design by Travis McHale left me wanting. There were lots of opportunities to use the boxy, cartoonish background with different positioning and use of space. The part of the show that I most appreciated was the costuming by Ren LaDassor. His use of detail on each costume piece helped the design really stand out. Sparkles on the glasses, wear and tear after an explosion, and best of all Kandy's helmet were the tiny things that showed LaDassor's integrity as an artist.

Overall it seemed as if director BT McNicoll wasn't paying close enough attention. Even with a weak script a good show could go on, especially with this cast! Although there are solid performances from Kristen Cirelli as Judy, Laura Daniel as Kandy, and the very skilled craftsman Ray Willis, it simply wasn't enough to save the show.

Written/created by: Michael W. Small
Directed by BT McNicholl
Presented by Red House Group and Joan Cullman Productions

Buy tickets for this show:

Sat August 9 6:45 pm
Thu August 14 4:15 pm
Sat August 16 3:15 pm
Wed August 20 8:45 pm
Sat August 23 1:45 pm

Heaven Forbid (s)!

reviewed by **Nat Cassidy**
Aug 9, 2008

Unlike the intermediate level of the afterlife imagined by Dante, a quasi-hell filled with both grueling punishments and a persistent feeling of hope trapped beneath the frozen nether-regions of Satan himself, the FringeNYC production

heartbreaking performance as Godlyman, the schizophrenic who sees God get on the bus everyday and knows the devil is always present. Gina Samardge, who plays Zaida, appears not to be acting, but to be possessed. If I were told that Samardge actually was a haunted homeless woman, I would completely believe it. Shpend Xani, David Tawil, and Tim Cain complete the group of Port Authority regulars. Every one of these characters is complex, disturbed, and excellently portrayed. There's also an evil detective named Develin, but the part isn't fleshed out enough to make us understand why he's so despicable.

Pawnshop Accordions is a new play, and writer Jonathan Wallace has done an excellent job in giving each character a unique voice and some very interesting, unusual material to work with (from Godlyman's repetitive rants, warnings, and off-the-wall comments to Egg Sandwich's confessions of his disturbing past in the Albanian Special Forces). Director Aaron Gonzalez has created a very rich, lively world with only a few folding chairs and a makeshift cart. Most of the action takes place in this area outside Port Authority, with the exception of a dream sequence for each of the main characters. These dreams sometimes give us a new light into the souls of these people (Zaida's particularly), but at other points feel like they are done for the benefit of the audience, rather than what the character would actually be dreaming (as for Roche).

Pawnshop Accordions is not a perfect play, but it is a very good one. This play has a lot of potential, a terrific cast, and, most significantly, heart and humanity.

Written/created by: Jonathan Wallace
Directed by Aaron Gonzalez
Presented by Howling Moon Cab

himself, the FringeNYC production of *Heaven Forbid(s)!* imagines Purgatory as the area right outside of the gates of Heaven. Perhaps this is even more torturous than the excoriating environment Dante imagined: the semi-damned souls are tantalizingly close to where they want to be, within shouting distance of a God whom they don't understand, or who doesn't understand them. It's an interesting idea, but, unfortunately, Marco Antonio Rodriguez's play finds itself hanging in the same perilous state: close to what it wants to be, but not quite there yet.

Gamely and confidently performed by Rodriguez and actress Rhianna Mack, *Heaven Forbid(s)!* is essentially a series of character-based vignettes, usually performed solo by one of the two actors, about the souls trapped outside of the pearly gates. We hear their life and death stories: how they were outcasts in life, and how they are (almost all of them) not surprised to find themselves outcasts in the afterlife, as well. The performance style is loose, close to improv at times, with a fair amount of audience interaction thrown in. (Only once was an audience member taken onstage, but there's a lot of call-and-response, and a tiny bit of jostling, so if that's not your cup of tea, sit towards the back.)

Besides this loose and entertaining energy, however, is a pervading sense of arbitrariness. As a dramatic piece, there is a lot about *Heaven Forbid(s)!* that just doesn't hold up. Several of the character pieces, while engaging and certainly fun, have nothing but an occasionally brief reference to their existential plight, and exist solely as set pieces for some other idea. For instance, one of the characters is a grief counselor who teaches techniques for fake tears—I enjoyed watching her

Company

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Sat August 9 2:15 pm
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Wed August 13 7:15 pm
Thu August 14 3:15 pm
Sat August 16 9:30 pm

Lucila's Story: a play for Gabriela Mistral

reviewed by **Jessica McVea**

Aug 9, 2008

Lucila's Story is a charming hour-long play about a little girl in late-19th century Spain. Lucila, surrounded by the rest of the cast sitting on colorful stools, begins by selling candies in her little town of Montegrande. We meet her discontented sister and her loyal but conflicted mother and soon learn that Lucila will be traveling to another village in Chile to go an actual school. We also meet Lucila's best friend, The Queen of Truth, a tree spirit in the forest of the Valley of Elqui. Remember her—she's quite important within the plot.

The set is very sparse—the aforementioned colorful stools are the only set dressing on the stage—and all the actors sit in a semi-circle and watch the play unfold. While I enjoyed watching the actors react to scenes they weren't in (Annalise Derr, who plays Lucila, was particularly good at this), I felt that much more of the stage could have been used. Some scenes were cramped into corners, some overlapped into others so I wasn't quite sure what village or even what scene we were in.

I felt the actors tried hard to work within the confines of this small world, but ultimately didn't quite overcome it. Granted, I went on opening night, which always brings its own set of problems. But because the play is set in

Lucila's Story, I enjoyed watching her spiel, but I never felt like I was watching a trapped soul stuck outside of her eternal reward. Or Rodriguez's portrayal of God as a "Cholo gang-banger": it was quirky and unique, but I spent the whole time wondering why.

Looking at the program, one of the first things I noticed is that the production doesn't have a director listed. Either the actors directed themselves, or there was some communal helming going on, but it no doubt contributed to the undisciplined feel of the piece. Part of the production's charm is its raw, fringe-y energy, but a push in the other direction would help immensely.

I must say, though, there was one moment of absolute transcendence, and it came from the least likely of places. One of Mack's characters, a pimp with a lost love and an affinity for Edith Piaf, was an unequivocal success in relaying the message and feel it seems Rodriguez is going for. Absurd though it may sound, Percy the Pimp's search for his "bitch" (his preferred nomenclature) in the afterlife is fascinating and terribly moving, and Mack plays him with expert ease and grace. That section alone is worth the price of admission, and it completely confirmed my belief: there is a very serious, very entertaining, and very poignant exploration of what it means to be an outsider inside this production.

Written/created by: Marco Antonio Rodriguez
 Directed by Marco Antonio Rodriguez
 Presented by Martice Enterprises

Buy tickets for this show:

Sat August 9 7:45 pm
Sun August 10 1:00 pm
Mon August 11 3:45 pm
Tue August 12 7:00 pm
Sat August 16 6:15 pm