

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Send In the Clowns!

Sylvie · Wednesday, September 26th, 2018

Old Clown Wanted at the Odyssey Theatre is a comic riff that recirculates a bunch of familiar ideas about clowns. ‘Recirculates’ is the operative word. Fun as some of them are, you won’t find many surprises in the shenanigans on stage.

This 1987 play by Romanian expat playwright Matei Visniec (he lives in Paris), offered here in a new translation by Jeremy Lawrence, is a 90-minute calisthenic exercise in comedy that perpetuates the enduring subtext attributed to clown shows: that clowns are people we admire for having the courage to be subversive under the guise of appearing foolish (or dangerous) when they are really visionaries unafraid to speak the truth. Staged at the Odyssey by Florinel Fatulescu, a fellow Romanian expat, *Old Clown Wanted* is performed by a venerable cast of three whose extended antics, if not new, securely uphold the clowning tradition.



José A. Garcia, Beth Hogan and Alan Abelew in *Old Clown Wanted* at The Odyssey.

Three clowns show up in a dark and empty waiting room in response to an ad asking for the services of an old clown. These three are, predictably, not only older, but down on their luck, in desperate personal need, and competitive to the point of combativeness. No one else shows up for this strange audition, which leaves these three plenty of room to become embroiled competing with one another anyway.

The plot of *Old Clown Wanted* goes nowhere in particular. Think *Waiting for Godot* crossed with Laurel and Hardy. It offers some room for speculation, reserving as it does a mildly Kafkaesque ending open to whatever interpretation you wish to place upon it. But that’s pretty much it for parallels and sources of inspiration.

Nicely rendered by José A. Garcia and Odyssey veterans Alan Abelew and Beth Hogan as Filippo, Niccolo and Peppina, respectively, these clowns are nothing if not supremely energetic survivors, full of what such survivors need — subterfuge, deceit, tricks and, above all, ego.

You can attach the usual political or philosophical subtexts to the situation, although none is heavily underlined or mentioned by name. Best think generically of the powerless finding ways to annoy and undermine the powerful, and in this case, each other.



Garcia, Abelew and Hogan in *Old Clown Wanted* at The Odyssey.

Lawrence's translation doesn't entirely escape the pesky creakiness that emerges when you switch linguistic idioms, but it moves along at a pretty good clip.

Hogan is particularly arresting in a speech that can only be described as her 11 o'clock moment. The set (designer is Jeff Rack), costumes (Amanda Marin), lighting (Bosco Flanagan) and props (Josh La Cour) are all up to their appointed tasks. But for some of us, it is impossible to escape the feeling that we've been here before. Probably more than once.

Time to bring in some younger generations. They may miss the subtext, but not the comedy.



l-r, Garcia, Hogan & Abelew in *Old Clown Wanted* at The Odyssey.

Top image: José A. Garcia, Alan Abelew & Beth hogan in Old Clown Wanted at The Odyssey.

Photos by Enci Box

WHAT: *Old Clown Wanted*

WHERE: Odyssey Theatre, 2055 So. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90025.

WHEN: Fridays & Saturdays, 8pm; Sundays, 2pm. Ends Nov. 4.

HOW: Tickets, \$32-\$37, available at www.OdysseyTheatre.com or by calling 310.477.2055 x 2.

- Special added performances **Oct. 3, 24 & Nov. 1, 8 p.m.**
- “**Tix for \$10**” performances, on **Sept. 29 & Oct. 24.**
- “**College Night**” **Oct. 19, \$10**, with valid ID (promo code COLLEGE).

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