

REVIEWING SMALL THEATER IN BALTIMORE



THE BAD ORACLE

UNDER THE POPLAR TREES -



PHOTO CREDIT: Bill Toohey

Standard Disclaimer: I live and work in Baltimore. So yeah, I know a ton of the people I review. Bias is real, it exists in me and everyone else – hence the BAD oracle. I don't review shows with my actual relatives associated with them, but other than that all bets are off. What can I say? You'll have to deal with it, but here's my promise: I'm biased, but I ain't stupid. I've got a (useless, as it turned out) degree in this shit and I know good theater. Small facts, though: everyone who reviews theater in every town everywhere knows everyone onstage and off. People are too nosy to have it be any other way. Reviewers who deny it are lying 100% of the time. Pissed about this? Don't read my reviews and we're square. I don't use my real name here because I work at a job where people make a frowny face when I say "fuck" and I dearly love to say "fuck"- but it ain't too hard to figure out who I am if you know what's what. I don't care, just don't get me fired, yeah?

While I was watching *Under the Poplar Trees*, now at Fells Point Corner, this weird thought occurred to me: what if there's a hate hole somewhere out there in the universe? What if an incomprehensibly awful event like the Holocaust could form a giant, sucking, vast hate hole that seems like it could be closed with more hate but actually can't be, ever? What *will* sew that hole and how could we ever fucking find the thread? I know that's bizarre, but this show takes you on a journey, man. Rosemary Frisino Toohey makes a quiet, simple story that stands in front of the ridiculous, insensitive clowning of a *Life is Beautiful* and the terrible torture porn of an *Apt Pupil* and looks at them and judges them and is so, so much better. I was deeply affected by it, even more so than when I look at pictures of the nail scratches on the walls of the gas chambers or the faded photos of ghastly faces looking out from behind barbed wire fences. It isn't that I think that those pictures, those things, should not be seen and spoken of, but looking at them with rapt (even thrilled) fascination too much for too long does the exact opposite of what we need – it pulls *away* the humanity when what we need is to go *towards* it. And this play goes. *towards*. it. On a stage that manages to be both homey and stark, with a cozy little hardwood table set against largely unadorned walls, Toohey's intentionally jarring, yet subtle, juxtaposition is excellently echoed in the set (design by Tony Colavito) and evident from the first moment. In the background, harshly projected, we see the famous words on the gates of Dachau, Auschwitz, and many other concentration camps: Arbeit macht frei. Work makes you free. Suddenly, we're in 1944, at the barracks of Dachau, where a new prisoner named Josef (Justin Johnson) is spouting some nonsense about cockroaches and crumbs, much to the irritation of his bunk mate, Meyer (Karin Zelenka). Meyer has seen much and been in the camp for too long, but something about Josef's inconceivable ability to remain joyful in the face of such pain starts to get to him, starts to change him. Josef is like the grass and the trees that grow in the camp, blithely, as if they don't even realize they are in the most horrible place existent. At first I thought the character was unbelievable, but as the show went on, Toohey gently reminded me that there actually

are such people on earth, people for whom happiness is a resistance, sometimes the only revolution they are allowed. We flash forward to now, Brooklyn, where a ninety-one year old Meyer (Jeff Murray) lives with his wife, Clara (Annette Mooney Wasno). Meyer is closed off, bitter, unhappy, as well he should be. He survived the camp, but his soul is heavily bruised with the kind of beating that years don't fade. As the play uncoils, we see scenes of Josef, both watching and commenting on Meyer and enjoying his afterlife, a paradise made paradisaical by the beautiful Desiree (Beth Amann), a dream goddess of highest order. We also meet Meyer's grandson, Aaron (Max Lanocha) about to be a father himself, and thirsting for the unbelievable history of his family, like we all would. Miriam Bazensky directs this with a light hand, she doesn't push. She has a singular ability to exercise restraint but be in no way held back. It's lovely, really. The cast is fucking outstanding, too. Jeff Murray, curiously playing yet another man consumed with bitterness (I last saw him in this spring's *Amadeus* at FPCT as Salieri) but this time because he is too full of ghosts, is just *magnificent*. He brings Meyer to life like Dr. Frankenstein, only, unlike that chucklehead, it's a real, real man he manages to create, no monsters to be seen. I was fully committed, invested, in him and believed him all the way. His chemistry with Wasno was amazing – I felt like they had really been married for years and years. Justin Johnson is a performer that I will be watching for years to come. I reveled in his performance, I savored it. He gave Josef so many layers, layers of desperation, of hope, of joy, of, yes, of course, yes, of fear. He was absolutely striking. The moments between he and Zelenka were the heart and soul of the play. There is a scene near the end, right after the poplar trees where Zelenka and Johnson ascend to an almost spiritual level that broke, broke, broke my heart. Amann provides a tender, peaceful and funny counterpoint to Johnson's energy and Zelenka's intensity – she brings the mellow that allows us to step back and breathe.

BOTTOM LINE: *Under the Poplar Trees* approaches the incredible, just *incredibly fucking tragic*, subject of the Holocaust with something lacking so many stories of this type: delicacy. Delicacy and grace, unnerving grace. This play is epic, universal, big. An excellent cast, thoughtful and simple tech and fluid direction make the themes hum and resonate like a tuning fork in your heart. This is a beautiful showcase for humanity. Deeply worth it. See it now.

Running at [Fells Point Corner Theatre](#) until August 31st.

SECOND OPINION?

<http://www.mdtheatreguide.com/2014/08/bpf-review-under-the-poplar-trees-at-fells-point-corner-theatre/>

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A N I D E A L H U S B A N D - A N O S C

THE JEWISH THEATRE WORKSHOP AND THE JCC PRESENT

An Ideal Husband
BY OSCAR WILDE
DIRECTED BY CHAYA SUSSMAN GOFFIN



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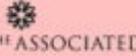
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HOW FAR WOULD A PERSON GO
TO RUIN ANOTHER'S REPUTATION?

HOW FAR WOULD A PERSON GO
TO PROTECT IT?

OSCAR WILDE EXPLORES THESE
QUESTIONS WITH HIS USUAL WIT
AND WITHERING FLAIR IN
"AN IDEAL HUSBAND"



An Ideal Husband

Standard Disclaimer: I live and work in Baltimore. So yeah, I know a ton of the people I review. Bias is real, it exists in me and everyone else – hence the BAD oracle. I don't review shows with my actual relatives associated with them, but other than that all bets are off. What can I say? You'll have to deal with it, but here's my promise: I'm biased, but I ain't stupid. I've got a (useless, as it turned out) degree in this shit and I know good theater. Small facts, though: everyone who reviews theater in every town everywhere knows everyone onstage and off. People are too nosy to have it be any other way. Reviewers who deny it are lying 100% of the time. Pissed about this? Don't read my reviews and we're square. I don't use my real name here because I work at a job where people make a frowny face when I say "fuck" and I dearly love to say "fuck"- but it ain't too hard to figure out who I am if you know what's what. I don't care, just don't get me fired, yeah?

Even for an avowed Oscar Wilde fan (and who isn't?) such as myself, *An Ideal Husband* is kind of tough going. Wilde was clearly working out some personal shit in this whole "secret secrets are no fun, secret secrets hurt someone" piece, not that I blame him. It's overlong, it lacks the silliness of *Earnest*, it's got some eye-rolling "Mars vs. Venus" prattle of the sexes moralizing at the end. I think that there's a notion among small theaters that because Wilde is *funny*, Wilde is *easy* and that just isn't so. The dialogue is intricate, the wit arcane, he can be off-puttingly snobbish and it sometimes fails to lift off for modern audiences even in the best of circumstances. So, I'm not sure this difficult-to-make-work show should have been top of director Chava Sussman Goffin's list for a company as small and truly community based as Jewish Theatre Workshop. But doing it they are, bless them. *Husband* kicks off in the home of Sir Robert (Dr. Reginald Carcon) and Lady Chiltern (Ariella McCown), uppercrusties having a dinner party. At said party is the devious Mrs. Chevely (Rachel Simms) aka "Trouble on Two Legs". Lady Chiltern and Mrs. Chevely are old school chums but there isn't any love lost between them. We soon see why. Almost immediately, Mrs. Chevely gets Sir Chiltern alone and gleefully lets it slip that she knows something he sure knows. During some pillow talk with an ex-husband, she found out that Chiltern amassed his fortune on the back of slipping a well-timed Cabinet secret into the ear of a slimy speculator and she's got a letter to prove it. She wants Robert to support a sketchy pet scheme of hers, something about canals in Argentina (which is mostly an excuse for Wilde to make some barely veiled "canal is like vagina" quips). Robert freaks out and promises he'll support anything if she'll just zip her lip about his criminal hush-hush. Robert's BFF, Lord Goring (Todd Shaffer), gets involved, instantly suspicious of Mrs. Chevely as he himself was once engaged to the she-devil. And then there are letters on pink paper, drawing room confusions, a missing brooch that suddenly turns up again and all that Wilde stuff. These are amateur performers (The word "amateur" gets tossed around a lot derisively and that's a shame. I was just chatting with someone the other day, I can't think who, about how "amateur" comes from the French for "lover of". These actors are really, honestly, *lovers of theater*. They don't get paid, the cast outnumbered the house last night, and they didn't get to go home until at least ten o'clock) on the rougher, more DIY end of the small theater spectrum. Admittedly, there *were* some cringey Guffman-esque moments. I'm pretty sure that The Countess of Basildon was reading her lines off of pages

affixed to the back of her fan, the wall stage right looked like it could topple over and kill someone any second, at one point the butler just barely made it off stage without totally losing control of a tray full of glassware, there was some pretty spectacular forgetting of lines. But there were bright spots too. Simms is mostly dead-on as the skeezy Mrs. Chevely. She understands the script and the character. I loved watching her smugly glide around, hips first, making horribly true observations about everyone. I wish that Goffin would have made her turn out of profile once in awhile, but que sera. Ariella McCown was nice and natural as poor Lady Chiltern. She grounded a character that can easily turn too goody-two-shoed. Reginald Garcon struggles with vocal variance as Robert, but he does do some nice flailing. I was lukewarm on Todd Shaffer's Lord Goring at first, but gradually he seemed to relax into the role, getting off some nice sardonic asides (he can also do a lounge on a Queen Anne sofa like nobody's business). I especially liked a climactic scene near the end when he and Mrs. Chevely are sexily going toe to toe. Among the giant cast, there were some eye catchers, too. Linda Maizels killed it as a jolly Mrs. Markby, a woman who has more to say than she has to think. And Henry Farkas made me giggle as a long suffering servant named Phipps who could not give less of a shit about which candle shades make a woman look prettiest. The less said about the tech probably the better. It looked pretty hastily assembled and was a touch shabby. The costumes (design by Chana Zeller and Rachel Zeller) were more *Designing Women* than Belle Epoch. As for the set (design by Etan Weintraub), I've seen more washed out colors than that hideous lavender on the walls, but not many. It looked especially bad under the glaring electric lights.

BOTTOM LINE: There is something hurrahish about a company as teeny as JTW taking on one of the most sharply funny, deliciously difficult wits to ever live. But *An Ideal Husband* is presented so staidly, so straight that it becomes an existential exercise in not getting the joke. That's not to say, however, that there isn't anything there. The play is rough, very rough in places, but then again, that's where diamonds sometimes start, right?

Running at [Jewish Theatre Workshop](#) until August 24th.

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REVIEWING IN SEPTEMBER

BROADWAY, BURLESQUE, LOWEES RIGAN

REVIEWED BY ACHILLES FEELS

by Twisted Knickers Burlesque

September 6th

ARWAGABOND PLAYERS

by Yasmina Reza

directed by Howard Berkowitz

September 5th – September 28th

PUBLIC FELLSIP(S)INT CORNER THE

by A.R. Gurney

directed by Lynda McClary

September 12th – October 4th

GAME SPHOOTW (GHTERS

REVIEWED BY ACHILLES FEELS

by Jeffrey Finn and Bob Walton

music by Bob Walton

directed by Kristen Cooley

September 12th – October 5th

M O T H E R S O N - C L U T C H I N G T H



A REVIEW BY ACHILLES FEELS

(The Feel's Disclaimer: I love Baltimore, I love Baltimore theatre... but I think it could be better. I'm reviewing alongside The Bad Oracle as a way to help expand what theatre is, can be, and will be in Baltimore. I'm going to tell people how awesome they are, or how awesome they could be. A lot of the shows I review have actors, directors, production staff, designers, or others that are my friends or even my arch-enemies. Even though I love and cherish these people (keep your enemies close!) I promise to be frank and honest in my reviews. I won't hold anything back, and praise will be duly delivered. I'm in the business of theatre myself, but I'm not a genius. I don't know everything. But I do know what I like and I know good theatre. Venues, box office people, ushers, tech folks, and program designers, please don't think you're off the hook. I'm looking at you too. If you don't like my opinion, I invite you to voice it in response to my reviews, but I reserve the right to rebuttal with a loving "fuck you." Some of what I say will be harsh, some will be sweet but I've got a weakness in my heel: BAD THEATRE.)

Somewhat predictable, yes, but *MotherSON*, currently at Baltimore Theatre Project, is nevertheless a pretty lovely production (and with accessible conversational dialogue to boot) to behold. The show is of the solo variety written and performed by New York's Jeffrey

Solomon. This is Jeffrey's first time on stage here in Baltimore, but this play has toured vastly throughout the US and abroad. SO P.S. – You should go see his work and support bringing amazing artists to the area. You won't regret it.

When I think about how people come out, young gay men specifically, I see, *exactly*, the story told on stage by Solomon and directed by David L. Carson. You really can't get any more sweet-toothed, sitcom-genre funny. Solomon plays Brad, the son in *MotherSON*, as a semi-autobiographical, vignette-style solo performance. He's also MOTHER Mindy, in a RULL stereotypical "Jewish Mother" sense of the word. Story in brief: Little Brad grows up, comes out to mom, mom does a huuuuuuge double take and starts with guilt trips galore, eventually coming around enough to reluctantly join a PFLAG chapter. We meet the boyfriend, and the rest is in the bag Hallmark-style. This multiple personality system works really well to tell this heartfelt story about a mother and her methods of dealing with, understanding, and eventually accepting her son's homosexuality. It feels a bit RENT at times but it works! She's shocked, he pushes her for acceptance and eventually she's marching down 5th avenue in the city's gay pride parade.

MotherSON is cute and *very* Will & Grace in that this-is-how-we-all-think-it-goes-hope-it-goes kinda way. Unfortunately, this is not how it *really* goes, and I found Solomon's story, while very enjoyable, a bit hard to believe as autobiographical. While it is touching (and it would be great if things really did happen this easily), I can't seem to stop thinking that this is missing the real drama that families go through in this situation. I want tears, I want screaming, I want the real shit that happens when the boy that grows up to love a man watches as his boyfriend battles terminal illness. Somehow Solomon's version did not quite take me as deep emotionally as I really wanted it to. The plot elements are there, it's just that the depth was missing. Somehow it was if I was watching an episode of the latest Fox sitcom on TV, where just as things get darkly serious, mom makes a joke about "PFAG... I mean PFLAG". And there, in that very instant, the story is made accessible, is made *safe*, and we're taken out of true emotions that may be real and unsettling.

But the show *is* funny, most successfully so in Solomon's use of the telephone and other small props. For example: As Brad, he picks up the phone and calls home. Mindy answers via overhead loudspeaker, and the dialogue banters back and forth, weaving its way in and out of hilarity. After a quick blackout and a shift in setting, Solomon flips the script and we see Mindy (with no costume change! BRILLIANT!!) lying on the sofa while we experience her point of view (And what a point of view! Again, stereotypes exist for a reason and there's no doubt that Solomon drew heavily on his own experiences to create these characters but *damn*. There's so many drawn out DAAAWWWlings in this show, you can practically smell the gefilte fish.) Solomon does an excellent job of pushing just the right elements of Mindy to the surface during the transitions. We clearly see both characters with simple nuance, tone, and inflection. This back-and-forth is difficult for any actor to do for a short duration but Solomon nails it for the entire 80-minute show. One of the best moments played out on stage

is the purse clutching staggering first-walk into a gay bar Mindy makes to meet Brad and his new boyfriend (Ohhh!! A DOCTOR!) for drinks. It's classic, hits the right notes, and is exactly how that experience might play out in real life.

The Bottom Line: *MotherSON* is simple, clean, easy to watch, and entertaining. Solomon's touching dedication to the root of his story, to moral and message, is noble and heartfelt. I loved watching him play Mindy/Brad and I adored the ingenious ways he uses props, sound effects, and simple settings to suggest time, place, and additional supportive characters. The 80-minutes flies by and keeps you engaged. Go see this show and experience what it means to have an oppressive Jewish mother in the most hysterical of ways; but don't expect the show to get to the core emotions of the majority of real *MotherSON* relationships.

Running at [Baltimore Theatre Project](#) until August 17th.

SECOND OPINION?

<http://theatrebloom.com/2014/08/review-motherson-at-baltimore-theatre-project/>

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08/15/2014 1 Comment

JULY'S "ACTOR STEALING THE

Why, hello, there. Welcome to a new feature at TBO. Each month, we're going to highlight an Actor who is currently Stealing the Spotlight (or, the ASS). This is someone from our community who particularly stood out for their performance or body of work the previous month (obviously from the shows that we actually reviewed). We thought it would be fun to shine some light on those who continue to make the Baltimore theater scene just fucking great.

AND THE ASS FOR JULY



T R E V O R W I L H E L M S

I was so excited that I nearly wet myself when I found out someone in Baltimore was going to be taking on *Marat/Sade* and doubly so (you can def doubly wet yourself) when I found it it was going to be Annex. I was so into the show that I fainted ([you can read about it here](#)) and one of my favorite parts of a real good thing was the performance of Trevor Wilhelms, who joined in spirit with a porcelain bathtub to bring us an insanely good Jean-Paul Marat. Here's what I said about him in the review:

While Doccolo is amazingly good and studied, it was Trevor Wilhelms who stole the show for me, admittedly by a very small margin. His Marat by way of paranoid cut my heart apart with his eyes. I swear to God at times I thought I saw SMOKE rising from his body, that's how fucking hot his performance was (from that damned bathtub, no less). He's so crazy he's sane, so smashed he rises above. I felt like he had electric wires running through his skeleton that were jolting him around like Frankenstein's monster. It. was. cray.

I seduced Trevor into an interview, so here's what he said:

Treeeevooooorrrr...what's going on?

I'm good, I'm good. I'm up on my roof right now taking a break from rehearsing for the Fields Festival, which is happening in a week, so I'm a couple of days behind. I'm really excited, I've never done a festival like this, out in the woods.

Are you just glad to be out of the bathtub? You sort of spent July sitting in four inches of dirty water. That's a good first date story.

Yes and no. I miss it. I haven't bathed or cleaned myself at all since being in it. It will be my eternal protest at leaving the bathtub.

One of things I really loved and responded to in the show is that you guys really went for it with the bathtub. It was so gross, with the dirty, bloody water.

Totally. Due to a couple of issues, we started working with it a little late, but once I got in there it was wonderful trying to figure out how the other half (well, other than Simone, of course) of Jean Paul worked. His porcelain womb, if you will.

So. Peter Weiss. Marat/Sade. One of my very favorite plays, an ambitious undertaking for a space like the Chicken Box. Had you seen or read the show before you were offered the role of Marat?

Absolutely. The first time I came across it I was in school which happens whenever you're studying theater. So I'd known about it for awhile and I was really really excited when it was proposed for our season.

Did you do any research into 18th century French revolutionary history or anything or did you just, you know, take a swan dive into the asylum?

We did research on both the latter revolution, the 1808 world of France and that perspective but also the height of Jean Paul's influence in the 1790s. We also did a fair amount of research on mental institutions, specific mental health afflictions, especially the ones presented within the show. You know, Weiss is so smart. There isn't a thing that's not considered in the construction of his piece, so to address one side [of the research] without the other is like trying to walk without your pinky toe, you're not in balance. One informs the other.

Do you like the show?

I love the show, I think it's amazing. It's poetic, it's dark as fuck. It exists in this amazing time flux. It's like a roller coaster. Like the moment de Sade is giving a speech about death and

his hatred of nature and he says in the midst of this wonderful monologue: "Haven't we experimented in our laboratories before applying the final solution?". There's so much of the twentieth century there, you blink your eyes and snap your head back and think about where and when we are and you ride that roller coaster. It's fun and disorienting and terrifying.

One of the ways I know something is really, really good, really effecting me, is when I sit down to watch it and I'm like "I want that. I want to own a piece of that. I'm jealous that I wasn't involved with that production." This show was one of those moments for me.

I think it was Marta Graham that said that artists are driven by divine dissatisfaction.

Yes. And critics DEFINITELY are. What was the most challenging thing about doing Marat/Sade in that space?

We're very lucky because our biggest challenge is also our biggest strength: getting the audience into the space, selling as many tickets as an organization as we can, but still having room for the performers to do the show. Annex faces this challenge with everything we do.

It's fun. It's like how do we redefine the spectator/performer relationship in this small space to the best of our ability? And Marat/Sade, as far as spectator/performer...oh, what's a good analogy? Like a piece of cotton candy wrapped in a Snickers bar inside of a Twizzler, turned into a Skittle and then melted down in vodka to be drunk at a pool party. Intimacy is integral to the physical impact, the storytelling. And so is the fear. The fear is such a real part of all the worlds we're existing in, the 1793 revolution, 1808 asylum, and, of course, the corner of North Avenue and Charles in our little fried chicken restaurant. You have people you probably know performing in front of you but you're also existing in a state of fear in terms of how this show will be presented, how far everyone on stage will go. It was a gift to have that relationship defined by our space.

What was it like working with Philip Docolo and Sarah Heiderman? Did you respond to their direction? I sure did, I loved the shit out of the show.

It was great! I love Sarah and Phil, they're great friends of mine. They really brought together an amazing ensemble of performers. They let us play, explore, fuck up real hard, and also let us grow from it and discover each of our unique inmates. From the beginning they established a space where you can take risks and make choices. It's pretty rare. I've never been in a situation where the entirety of an ensemble was willing to make off the fucking wall weird choices from the very first rehearsal. They did a wonderful job of leading that charge, opening those doors and pointing us in the right direction.

Were rehearsals with you and Philip really intense? I felt like you could light a fucking firecrackers with the eye contact between you guys.

It was really fun. It was great to rehearse with Phil. I remember towards the very beginning of the process we were sitting and talking about one of our scenes and we just sat there and tried to understand every word Weiss had written. We talked through every little thing. It was really great from the first moment. It was wonderful working a scene with him, I would throw something his way and he would catch it and send it back to me at, like, three times the temperature, and it was like "Ohhhhh, this is how it's gonna go." We're both goofy loud guys who like to laugh a lot and we had that moment where we were like: "All right, if we're gonna do this, we're REALLY gonna do this." And it was beautiful that it didn't need to be verbally expressed. "Yeah, we're going to fucking do this!". Couldn't ask for anyone better than Phil.

Who is your favorite character in the piece other than your own? Why?

[LONG PAUSE]

Ohhhhh...that's tough. Everyone's really fun. I guess in terms of the written characters the quartet is amazing. They serve such an incredible purpose. They are this one being split into four souls, it's just so fascinating. I guess when I'm thinking "favorite" it's what else I personally would like to play. The Herald is wonderful. Charlotte is so beautifully written and was performed amazingly in our production.

It's hard, right, because Weiss wrote his show like a symphony.

Exactly, that's it. With the soloists and melodies coming in.

Why do you think Marat/Sade is relevant to perform RIGHT NOW?

It does exist in this very plastic understanding of time. The great and awful thing about this play is that it will probably be relevant at any point in the future. It's just got that dark spark of continuum that is always always going to be relevant. There's always going to be the conflict between the revolutionary and the reactionary. Debate between violence and discussion. I actually wish it *wasn't* so relevant but I think in our cultures in the West, there's always going to be a discourse between Marat and de Sade. They will always be present, they will always be speaking. They'll just have different names when you turn on CSPAN.

What is the best theater company in Baltimore?

Annex Theater. Without a doubt. But, I should say, that's coming from, not that it needs qualifying, but it's my opinion. The beauty of Baltimore is that you can find anything you want here.

Wanna talk some shit about anyone in the cast or crew and have it attached to your name forever on the internet?

Yeah, I do!

Wow! Really? Making Trevor the first person to ever answer that question!

Yeah, yeah! I have something to say. Something to say to the ENTIRE INTERNET. On stage, every single night, there was a giant mirror. One night, I stepped on it and slashed the bottom of my heel open. I want the *whole internet* to read this: FUCK THAT MIRROR. It hurt! It hurt really bad! I bled real blood for this show! I refuse to work with that mirror ever again.

Oh, I'm gonna get e-mails.

From the mirror?

Mmmhmm. And the mirror's friends, and everyone who has ever worked with the mirror, and it's just going to turn into a giant shitshow. Thanks, Trevor.

Just tell them to contact me. I'll take this one.

Anything you've been dying to say to the Baltimore theater scene? You can scold and holla.

Hi. It's me. Trevor. I love you. I'm sorry I didn't call the other week. I was busy with my bathtub. So don't tell my bathtub we're talking, 'kay? I want to let you know I really appreciate everything you do and I hope I can *give* you everything that you *give* me.

Youknowwhatl'msayin'? I'm sorry I got so drunk at your Mom's house. Everyone says it stains but it doesn't stain. Just tell your mom I'm sorry and give me a call. Or Snapchat me.

What's coming up next for you?

The Fields Festival will be held on August 22-24th [www.fieldsfestival.com] and I'm performing on the 24th at 4:00. It's a thirty minute solo performance, it should be fun... ohohoh! This is big. There's an Annex fundraiser at the Windup Space on August 28th so keep your eyes and ears open for that. And there's a wonderful Howard Street project going on, we're just waiting for the mayor to sign off on it. So if anyone knows the mayor, tell her that this project absolutely has to happen. Not in a threatening way. In an enthusiastic way.

Annex also has some great shows coming up, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* at the Canteen will kick off the season, so go to <http://www.baltimoreannextheater.org>.

HI MOM! HI DAD! I'm glad you got a new cat the other week. What else is coming up for me? I'm moving out of my apartment so if anyone wants a realllly heavy sleeper sofa, they can call me, but they have to get it out of my apartment. My foot itches. I don't like being stung by bees and, oh, HI, MOLLY! Put that in.

Got someone you'd like to nominate for next month's ASS? E-mail me at

T H E R A T R E P O R T



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Welcome to the RAT REPORT, a reoccurring feature at The Bad Oracle. This is where I round up, report, gossip, tattle and rat on what's going on with the Baltimore small theater scene. If you've got something you want me to include in a future RAT REPORT, e-mail me at emailthebadoracle@gmail.com subject RAT REPORT.

- Everyone has already heard about this, but congrats to the scrappy scamps of

Annex, EMP Collective, Stillpointe Theatre, Acme Corporation, and Psychic Readings (and especially a ringleading Evan Moritz of Annex) for actually getting this Howard Street Theatre Incubator multiple storefront space thing off the ground. With the money muscle of Teddy Rouse, the project was approved by BDC in late July which means it's probs going to be a go. Getcha some tax credits and bring this shiz to the West Side!

- Iron Crow is currently in a whole flurry of a tizzy of updates including a new website, logo and Executive Director, Sean Elias. Maybe getting all that action will shoot some Botox into those crow's feet and rejuvenate things over there.
- WTF is up with the Baltimore Playwright's Festival? It seems like every time I turn around another one of their productions is being cancelled. Vagabond killed something called *Mrs. Maslow's Boarding House*, a BPF project due to open on July 25, and then Spotlighters pulled the plug on *In A Yellow Wood* which was supposed to go up in August. Disorganization? Lack of interest? Who knows.
- Brad Norris and Alicia Stanley, two of the braniacs behind this spring's excellent *Edward II* at Spotlighters, cooked up a new project, known as Cohesion Theatre Company, in late June. Their official launch party is going to be on Friday, September 26th at Gallery 788 in Hampden, though I have yet to receive my invitation. I may just crash it, Maleficent style. From their Facebook page: *We are a Baltimore based Theatre Company with a focus on immersive theatrical experiences, and collaboration with artists of all disciplines.* Sounds a little vague, but there's clearly talent there. I'm watching.
- Glass Mind added a bunch of new company members (pictured above) to their ranks in early June: Jessica Ruth Baker (Technical Director) Sam Hayder (Development Director), Jesse Herche (Production Manager), Kate Smith-Morse (Resident Stage Manager) and Ann Turiano (Literary Manager) all joined the team at once and had what I assume was a ritual swearing in involving the masks of comedy and tragedy, blood and Natty Boh. Welcome home, guys.
- Lotsa Season 2014-2015 announcements, here they are with the plays I'm looking forward to the most: Vagabond [*Interlock* by Ira Levin], Iron Crow [*The Revelation of Bobby Pritchard* by Rich Espey], Fells Point Corner [*Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* by Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield], Spotlighters [*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Dale Wasserman adapted from the novel by Ken Kesey], Baltimore Rock Opera Society [*The Electric Pharaoh* by The BROS], Baltimore Shakespeare Factory [*Comedy of Errors* by WS], Glass Mind [*Welcome to the White Room* by Trish Harnetiaux].
- AUDITIONS, KITTENS – BIGGGGGG AUDITION ALERT! Baltimore Theatre Community Annual Auditions will be held on August 23rd and 25th at Center Stage. Reps from Center Stage, Everyman Theatre, Single Carrot Theatre, Spotlighters, Children's Theatre Association, Bay Theatre Co., Pumpkin Theatre, Glass Mind Theatre, and more are gonna be there, so it's totes worth it. Go here for info. Spotlighters is still auditioning for *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* so if you've got a hankering to wear some sparkle shoes and experience massive boob sweat, get you to it this weekend, August 9th and 10th, go here. They are also auditioning for *The Man Who Came To Dinner* on

August 16th, [go here](#). Glass Mind is auditioning for Season 5 shows August 16th and 19th, [go here](#).

08/08/2014 5 Comments

INTO THE WOODS - NICE IS



Into the Woods – Angela Sullivan as The Witch

A REVIEW BY ACHILLES FEELS

(The Feel's Disclaimer: I love Baltimore, I love Baltimore theatre... but I think it could be better. I'm reviewing alongside The Bad Oracle as a way to help expand what theatre is, can be, and will be in Baltimore. I'm going to tell people how awesome they are, or how awesome they could be. A lot of the shows I review have actors, directors, production staff, designers, or others that are my friends or even my arch-enemies. Even though I love and cherish these people (keep your enemies close!) I promise to be frank and honest in my reviews. I won't hold anything back, and praise will be duly delivered. I'm in the business of

theatre myself, but I'm not a genius. I don't know everything. But I do know what I like and I know good theatre. Venues, box office people, ushers, tech folks, and program designers, please don't think you're off the hook. I'm looking at you too. If you don't like my opinion, I invite you to voice it in response to my reviews, but I reserve the right to rebuttal with a loving "fuck you." Some of what I say will be harsh, some will be sweet but I've got a weakness in my heel: BAD THEATRE.)

Into the Woods is one of those musicals that everybody loves. There is something in it for practically every theatre goer; even the most catty reviewer like myself. Shows by Sondheim traditionally contain very difficult pieces of music to perform. The moving scales, the random (very) high-notes, the choruses where everybody has the same syllable pattern with each role is singing completely different words, and the extremely fast cadence of tongue-twisters like:

"Better stop and take stock/While you're standing here stuck/On the steps of the palace. "

Seriously people, look at the lyrics to *Into The Woods*, or *A Little Night Music* and even reading them out loud will twist your tongue (and mind!) into knots. Singing them, along with the intended emotion and stage blocking, is even more difficult. This shiz-nit is hard!

This lyric heavy show in 2 (long) acts, currently playing at MICA's BBOX theatre from Purple Light Theatre Company, combines the stories of every single childhood fairy tale you've ever loved and then pushes them all to the next, slightly twisted, level. The extremely dense plot begins with the Baker (Dan Wagner) and His Wife (Beth Amann) whining about the qualms and strife of everyday childless life. We quickly find out that the childlessness is caused by a curse from the disgruntled old lady living next door: The Witch (Angela Sullivan). In a moment of weakness, ('cause really, what witch tells you how to break her evil spells?!) she tells the semi-happy duo how to break the infertility curse, which includes gathering some incredibly random items. And here we go: *Into the Woods*. To procure these strange components, the couple venture out into their fairy tale land complete with many a gothic tower and talking tree.

They lie, cheat, steal, and generally manipulate, in the most hilarious of ways, the arsenal of characters they come across: Little Red (Katie Ganem), Cinderella (Sherry Benedek) Rapunzel (Emily Morgan) Jack (Paul Kennedy) and His Mother (Cheryl J. Campo). Through the slow and painful acquisition of their baby-making ingredients (cape as red as blood, hair as yellow as corn, cow as white as milk, and slipper as pure as gold) general confusion ensues and we start to lose touch with why each character in this large cast is doing what it is trying to do to. By the end of Act I, we've got an angry (female!) Giant (voiced by Rose Wallace), a few dead characters, and voila! A baby! The Narrator (Jessica Ruth Baker) interjects throughout the show and tells the cast and audience like it is, fills in the blanks with jokes, transmits obvious off stage happenings, and imparts the sweet-toothed morals the book positively brims with. During Act 2, we understand how everybody's twisted wishes have lead them down paths of revenge, questionable decisions, and greed. We round out the story with a non-traditional family, a paternal unveiling, an abandoned evil Witch, and a

everybody (who has survived) living happily ever after... ever after... ever after...

Uber kudos goes to The Purple Light Theatre Company for presenting, as their second show ever, *Into The Woods*. But let's back up for just a moment. Sondheim. Sondheim as your second production. Ever. That's more than a bit ambitious. IMHO, this team, spearheaded by Artistic Director (and Costume Designer) Tommy Malek, bit off slightly more than they could chew, with mixed results. With an artistic and production team comprised mostly of recent UMBC grads, I don't think this team was ready to fully execute the version of *Into The Woods* they were hoping to present. For example: the set, designed by William K. D'Eugenio, was simple, fit perfectly into MICA's BBOX performance space, and was well crafted. But I wondered why they chose to use two aluminum extension ladders in one place when the rolling ladder they used in another was simply aged 2x4's and large dowels. 2x4's are a more simple approach and would have been cohesive than 2 shiny, labels-still-on, extension ladders that glared and gleamed in the lights. The lighting (also by D'Eugenio) tried really hard to be exceptional. But the actors mostly missed their marks and there seemed to be some issues calling the show which left people, frequently, in the dark. This also could have been due to not enough tech rehearsal time or a half-asleep lighting console operator not paying attention, (no board-op was credited in the program.) D'Eugenio clearly tried to make a very dynamic show with an exceptional arsenal of technical tools, but way too often there was not enough contrast on the performers faces, leaving them looking flat, adequately illuminated, or simply backlit. The haze was a nice touch, but was not used to its potential to convey volumetric texture.

Since this show is so incredibly dense, it is difficult (but not impossible) to pick out performances that I found to be stellar. As a whole, the entire cast needs to work on their stage confidence and vocal projection. It is obvious that every single performer on Purple Light's stage has a wonderful voice, but few sang out, making it very difficult to follow the story. The "entire company" numbers were indeed exceptional, when each performer could lean on the next for vocal support. That said, I really enjoyed the duo that is Dan Wagner and Beth Amann. Their chemistry was awkwardly dry, which worked well for a slightly disheveled couple dealing with life. Angela Sullivan belted her tones quite wonderfully and nicely portrayed the various transformations that The Witch goes through over the course of the two acts. Katie Ganem worked *hard* for the money, in a role I'm not sure she's appropriate for, but it ultimately payed off well. You can tell she really gave this show her all (I only wish we did not get her back to the audience quite so frequently so we could hear her voice better). As I said before, the rest of the vocals were obviously there, just not in strong and confident voice, so they got lost as mission-critical solo moments.

Direction by Malek (with Music Direction by Benjamin Nabinger) was strong and well executed. There is constant, deliberate movement throughout a show that can easily stagnate visually. I questioned the constant movement of the prop chest, but it worked okay and revealed some wonderfully funny moments. I'm glad the team decided to use recorded

orchestrations (by: MTPit, L.L.C; a very common pre-recorded music track for musicals without a live pit orchestra) as it helped to keep the fast pace of the performances on target. Otherwise I'm sure the show would have dragged on. The sound system was strangely balanced, with a speaker cluster somewhere offstage and to one side that sounded muffled and overly bassy. Performers were not individually miced and this combined with some unprojected singing lead to the loss of about ½ the show's fabulous lyrics. At one point, we did hear a bit of high-pitched squelch in the sound coming from above, so there were mics somewhere that were ineffectively used. (There's no sound engineer credited in the program, a big no-no for a musical at this scale)

The Bottom Line: *Into The Woods* is a hard-as-hell show to put on, but PLT put it together in a way that makes you say "cheerio to them!" For a show that often drags on, and on, and on, they kept up the pace and kept me interested in what was happening for the majority of the show. This team of stellar singers are to be commended for pulling off this lyric-heavy production with such suave and charisma. I wonder where Purple Light is going and am excited to see what is next on their docket. I only hope they pick something a little more suited for a company fresh out of the gate.

Running at [The Purple Light Theatre Company](#) from July 25th-August 3rd

SECOND OPINION?

<http://dcmetrotheaterarts.com/2014/07/27/woods-purple-light-theatre-company/>

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T H E S P A N I S H T R A G E D Y - D R



The Spanish Tragedy- Megan Farber as Don Andrea. In the background, from left to right: Jennifer Hasselbusch as Isabella, Daniel Douek as the King of Spain, and Matthew Purpora as Balthazar

PHOTO CREDIT: Joshua McKerrow

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not be sorry, I guarantee it. Luckily, though, I think you'll find a couple more reasons. Frank Vince turns in a barnstorm of a performance as Hieronimo, he chews it up so hard I'm surprised there were floorboards left on the stage. It's like a Velazquez portrait of grief, so over the top. He's especially great when he really starts to lose his marbles (the guy has a *serious* crush on his son). Rob Vary was pretty dashing and swaggery as Horatio, even if his part was fairly brief. He turns in it with an extra teensy touch of smarm that really worked. I thought that Kat McKerrow's Bellimperia was a little vague in the opening scenes but she turned out to hold her own in this sausage factory, she's excellently swoony right up until she starts stabbing some bitches. Matthew Purpora (who has hair like a romance novel cover) was swimmingly scowled as Balthazar and made a cute couple with Bill Soucy's Disney villainous Lorenzo, who plays it real boohissingly. Couple of highlights from the supporting cast: my treasure, the beautiful Argentinian lion that is Daniel Douek, is back and having a royal good time as The King of Spain. Ishai Barnoy is always a gift to watch, his weird take on the Duke of Castile (what's with the hand?) is fun and kind of witty. Jeffrey Gangwisch made some bizarre choices for the scraping and cringing servant Pedringano but the more I thought about it the more I liked it. I'm a little in love with him now. And Jennifer Hasselbusch was surprisingly and genuinely poignant in her role of Isabella, Horatio's poor mother. The cast was great, the tech was a little rocky. Scene changes took 4fuckingever and there's an amateurish tree that caused so many problems and was so awkward that I probably would just as soon they cut it.

BOTTOM LINE: *The Spanish Tragedy* is a relentless straight shooter that doesn't stray far from box, book, bell or candle but it does truly understand the pot boiler that it is and boy, does that pot boil. It's fun to watch good, old-fashioned scenery chompin'. It could use a pick up of some ponderous scene changes and to fix some elementary technical issues. For a July evening, though, it's passionate, entertaining and there are swords and hangin' and some excellent grossness and hot hotties in tight tighties. In other words? *Yes, please.*

Running at [Mobtown Players](#) until July 26th.

SECOND OPINION?

<http://dcmetrotheaterarts.com/2014/07/12/spanish-tragedy-mobtown-players1/>

http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2014-07-16/entertainment/bal-gore-and-mayhem-from-annex-theater-mobtown-players-20140716_1_annex-theater-horatio-mobtown-players

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REVIEWED BY ACHILLES FEELS

by Jeffrey Solomon

August 14th – August 17th

A N I D E A L E M U S M A N D E) A T R E W O R K S

by Oscar Wilde

directed by Chava Sussman Goffin

August 17th – August 24th

U N D E R T H E B P A O L P T L I A M R O R T E R E P E L S A Y (W R I G

P O I N T C O R N E R T H E A T R E

by Rosemary Frisino Toohey

August 14th – August 31st

SPECIAL DRNEAP OF RHTE!A T R E A T A R



The Brothers Avienne- Greg Bowen and Sean Lundgren as The Brothers

PHOTO CREDIT: DNA Theatre

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Hi! The Bad Oracle brings you this special report right from the seventh depth of hell that is Artscape! I mean, I like Artscape, don't get me wrong, but everyone knows that it's like being on the surface of the goddamned sun. I went to review Daydreams and Nightmares (DNA) Theatre, an intriguing bunch of folks that perform suspended in the air on a variety of apparatus that would instantly kill me if I attempted to use any of it. They curated the Aerial Arts Stage and themselves performed shortened versions of new and old work (they've been around for ten years now, they've got some stuff in the can). The first thing I saw them do was *The Brothers Avienne*, an adaptation of a German fairy tale (at least, I think it was German, it seemed German) written and conceived by Elle Brande, Aerial Director of DNA. It's about a wicked old queen (Ali Cheff) who gets jealous of the king's sons (Greg Bowen and Sean Lundgren) and curses them, transforming them into swans and leaving their only sister, Avienne (Jessie Delaplaine) behind. I want to get this out of the way: I don't think Jessie Delaplaine is actually human. I require blood analysis to prove she isn't some sort of X-Man. Her body is absolutely amazing. She achieves a shoulder rotation that actually made my mouth drop open. Greg Bowen is literally always a treat to watch, the lines of his figure make him seem like an eight foot tall Grecian god, which really works for this type of thing. He also is the one my eyes are consistently drawn to, even if he isn't performing the most complicated routine onstage, because his eyes transmit emotion so effectively and interestingly. While Delaplaine is stunning, her face seems set solidly, which is probably necessary for concentration but doesn't really let us into her head. Lundgren and Bowen work extremely well together, you can sense the trust between them. Their swan transformation sequence was my favorite thing about the piece. The only thing I thought that slightly brought it down was the inclusion of a narrator (Lansing O'Leary) who walked across the stage from time to time inserting rather clunky dialogue. It makes it seem as if Brande doesn't completely trust her work to speak for itself. I, personally, would cut it. More successful in this regard was the other piece I saw, *Look Up*, an adaptation of the story of Icarus, the one who flew too close to the sun, by Artistic and General Director Kel Millionie and choreographed by Marissa O'Grinn. The challenge of aerial theater is to make sure that you're not merely creating "pretty pictures" but flesh and blood stories that have true weight to them. Millionie nails that in this piece. There was a point where Icarus (Thomas Martin) was performing on the silks that actually brought tears to my eyes. Martin has lovely lines and is clearly a star, which absolutely worked when he was onstage solo. Unfortunately, I thought he didn't "give" or share enough with his co-stars, particularly a lovely Patrice Woodward, who plays his love, Princess of the Sea Undine. You can physically and literally see Woodward reaching out for Martin but he doesn't seem to reciprocate at her level of emotion. But the story is so strong and the choreography so good that this is a minor quibble. Costumes by Nikki LeFay were brilliantly eye-catching, combining beauty with function seamlessly and notching the quality of the already very high-quality production up a tick. Oh, and the wings of Icarus (made by

Mixed Media artist Sean Conray) are a work of art. I wish that they had occupied more than a blink and you'll miss it part of the show, but that's why I'll go to see the full version of this when it is staged.

BOTTOM LINE: DNA wants you to "watch us fly" and believe me, you'll be blown away when you do. Because when DNA flies, the birds themselves are jealous and the angels turn to watch. I don't think it's a stretch to say that they are the most evocative, talented and well curated aerial company in Maryland and possibly beyond. There is *no doubt* that they have their physicality completely in the bag. If they pushed a bit further, though, if they truly committed to all of their stories, if they would live inside of the emotion 100% instead of sometimes sitting outside of it, then. Well. There would be no grounding them. Ever again.

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