ON THE FRINGE REVIEWS FROM THE EDGES OF THE THEATER SCENE

‘Earhart’ plots a promising course; shaky ‘Experience’

By Nina Metz
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

“Amelia Earhart Jungle Princess” ★★ 1/2

For all we know, Amelia Earhart crash landed on a remote island in the Pacific and got her native on while idiotic men in boardrooms plotted her rescue. That’s the idea—entirely fictional, by the way—in “Amelia Earhart Jungle Princess,” the debut offering from The New Colony that paints Earhart as a proto riot grrrl in disintegrated threads and tangled hair.

The comedy of errors takes place two years after the aviatrix went missing during her 1937 attempt to circumnavigate the globe. A group of corporate types—men who gradually devolve into savages, face paint an an- all—decide it would be a killer publicity stunt to find out if Earhart is really alive.

It turns out she is (Nicole Pellegrino, amusingly feral and exasperated with civilization) and she’s not to keen on becoming someone’s dress-wearing corporate shill.

(That doesn’t exactly jibe with reality, by the way. Earhart endorsed products pretty actively during her lifetime. The play isn’t meant to be historically accurate, though the gender politics feel right.)

The scenes flip back and forth in time between the savages in suits and the search party on the island—and it took me a while to catch on. Written by James Asmus and developed by the ensemble, the play needs to be clearer when and where we are at any given time.

There’s a lack of flow and the jokes don’t always land, but a major saving grace is Josh Odor’s exaggerated, hyper-serious turn as an island guide/pilot who brings to mind Steve Martin doing Clint Eastwood. The performance doesn’t fit with the rest of play, but the guy is seriously entertaining. You have to take your fun where you can.

Last year Asmus and director Andrew Hobgood teamed up at the Amcnyace with “Love is Dead: A Nec-Romantic Musical Comedy,” which subsequently had a nice run at the New York International Fringe Festival. I liked this show a lot more. There’s a lot of potential for New Colony, an ensemble that seems very interested in toying with the comedy of genuine human complexity.

Through Nov. 2 at National Pastime Theater, 4139 N. Broadway; $15-$28 or 900-838-3006 or thenewcolony.org.

“No Experience Necessary” ★★

There is never a shortage of sketch comedy around these parts, but good luck finding material written and performed by people of color. MPACT (Ma’at Production Association of Afrikan Centered Theatre) has done the occasional sketch show in the past, and this time the company taps into the undercurrent of racial politics that has defined the presidential campaign.

The show has its moments (written by Kevin Douglas), but the ticket price is steep by sketch standards. Jonathan Keaton is hilarious with an impersonation that cannily exposes the two faces of Jesse Jackson. Rap music is called out: “We need less polgant and more nonsensical,” says a record producer. There is also a pretty biting riff on BET’s “106 & Park” video countdown, featuring songs about booty, booty, and yet more booty.

About half the sketches fail, but director Carla Stillwell has a good cast (Ashley Olivia is a standout, her sad death stare during a bit about Darfur is priceless) that knows how to sell the funniest lines, including: “I’m un-Google-able.” Say it out loud. It just sounds funny. Sometimes that’s all you need.

Through Nov. 2 at the Greenhouse Theater, 2257 N. Lincoln Ave. Tickets are $19.50-$22.50 at 773-404-7336.

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