

Time Out

New York

The obsessive guide to impulsive entertainment

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U.S. Drag

HERE, 145 Sixth Ave between Spring and Broome Sts (212-647-0202). Subway: C, E to Spring St; 1, 9 to Canal St. \$15. Thu–Sun 8:30pm. Through Jul 7. Like an urban legend come to life, this New York comedy by Gina Gionfriddo rolls out the gold-digging party girls, nice young boys, slacker artists and a serial killer named Ed. The lovely and talented team of Maria Striar and Meg MacCary and the impossibly silly Vin Knight make up part of the cast, directed by Pam MacKinnon in Clubbed Thumb's first Summerwork.

CLUBBED THUMB'S SUMMERWORKS

June 15–July 17

Here, 145 Sixth Avenue, 647-0202

Clubbed Thumb continues its enterprising playwriting with three new works. Gina Gionfriddo's *U.S. Drag* tracks a serial killer in NYC; Rinne Groff's *Jimmy Carter Was a Democrat* climbs up with the air traffic controllers at La Guardia; and Lisa D'Amour's *16 Spells To Charm the Beast* tells the tall tale of an ever growing apartment building and, well, a Beast. (Parks)

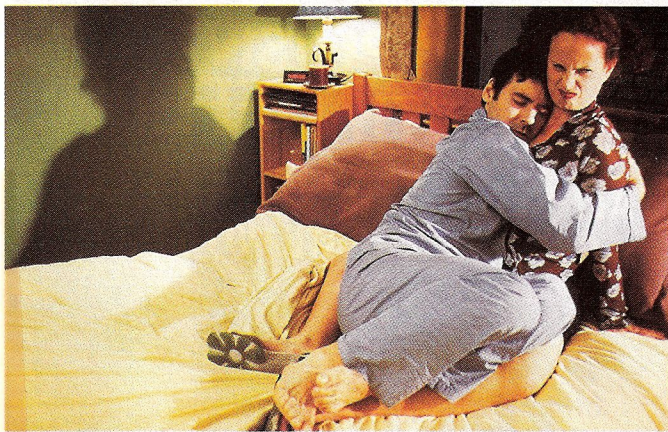


VOICE CHOICES

U.S. Drag

The innovative, odd theater company Clubbed Thumb kick-starts its sixth Summerworks festival with Gina Gionfriddo's bizarre comic thriller, in which two party girls mix it up with a neurotic writer and a serial killer. \$15. Thurs.–Sun. at 8:30. Through 7/7. • HERE, 145 Sixth Ave. (212-802-8007).

THEATER



SHADOW OF A DOUBTER The insecure Zickel needs a hug from Striar.

U.S. Drag

By Gina Gionfriddo. Dir. Pam MacKinnon. With ensemble cast. HERE (see Off-Off Broadway).

Who's Ed? That's the big question hanging over Gina Gionfriddo's paranoid Seinfeldian satire, *U.S. Drag*. This much we know: He's a serial killer stalking the streets of New York who stops pedestrians and asks for their help. When they do, he attacks. Those who get away never seem to be able to describe anything about him. Among the materialistic women and ineffectual, needy men who populate this urban landscape of losers, several seem suspicious.

James (Erich Strom) fits the sociopath profile: socially awkward, quiet, and inordinately interested in the lives of famous murderers and their victims. Christopher (Mather Zickel) is a writer of "creative nonfiction" who would do anything to sell his books. Also, his girlfriend Angela (Maria Striar) appears awfully cold-blooded. And what about that intense and excitable Wall Street toiler, Ned (Ian Helfer)? His name's a dead giveaway. What all these characters have in common is that they are all singularly obsessed with themselves and seemingly unable to communicate with each other. They are as disconnected as the sketches of people that wallpaper Craig Siebels's neatly organized three-part set.

Pam MacKinnon's overlong production has an uneven cast and needs a better staged conclusion. Nevertheless, there's something quite appealing about Gionfriddo's portrayal of overeducated,

whiny bachelors. So what if this cinematically structured work won't survive the ages? It still registers as something more than just a guilty pleasure. Gothamites will recognize this particularly modern milieu of dating services, self-help groups, adult card games and book clubs (which only choose Oprah-sponsored works, of course). Gionfriddo sends up these desperate attempts at connection with giddy aplomb. In this quick-witted play, which has the cheek of a Dennis Miller stand-up routine, the only thing that really brings people together is their fear of Ed.

For some, it even becomes chic to be his victim. "I want to be like Kato Kaelin," cries one girl. "I want to do nothing and talk about it and have people give me money. I want somebody to sexually harass me!" Gionfriddo displays a real talent for punchy comic dialogue, and her more vivid caricatures are idiosyncratic enough to bring new life to derivative ideas. Vin Knight is priceless as Evan, the hippie leader of the support group SAFE (Stay Away From Ed); he demands that "you must respect my comfort level." Meg MacCary and Striar are less nuanced as the materialistic New York social climbers dishing in the sassy lingo of glossy women's magazines.

Gionfriddo's brand of dark, almost mean, ironic humor is much in vogue, and she is just the kind of talented playwright who gets grabbed up by TV or film. It's a shame. Theater needs light, yet unfrivolous, plays such as *U.S. Drag*. Otherwise, audiences are left to choose between high art or silly fluff—and there's got to be more than that. —Jason Zinoman

THEATER