



punkplay

Clubbed Thumb Summerworks Festival at Ohio Theater

June 8, 2009

Reviewed by VanLoan

vanloan@nyconstage.org

Since 2000, the fiercely innovative Clubbed Thumb has staged their annual Summerworks Festival at the Ohio Theater. An anchor in the downtown New York theater scene, it's a month long festival of new plays using some of the city's best theater talent. Two of the plays (of the three in the festival) that I viewed are both so fresh and wildly imaginative that one is left dramatically shocked and awed. We can only bow our heads in thanks for the muscular energy that Clubbed Thumb has shown through their commissions and development in this time of economic constipation



L-R: Alex Anfanger as Duck and Michael Zegan as Mickey

Photo: Carl Skutsch

punkplay by Gregory Moss is a story of adolescent angst set in during America's claustrophobic Reagan years. As Duck (an intense Alex Anfanger) proclaims, "the 70's was the asshole and the 90's are the balls, the 80's are the skin in between". He's a problem teenager in the 'rebel without a cause' mold that has been kicked out of his home after refusing his father's request to go to an "army school". Duck shows up at his best friend

Mickey's (a wonderfully awkward Michael Zagen). Mickey allows Duck to temporarily camp out on the floor of his cramped white on white bedroom (the ingenious set design is by Lee Savage who pulls a lot of surprises out of the small room). The only outlet the two boys have in the deadening confines of their insipid suburban world is the anarchy and outrageous rebellion of the era's punk rock music scene.

Director Davis McCallum opens the play explosively with the two young actors ferociously roller skating (no rollerblades yet) around the tiny set. With their excellent maneuvering, Mickey and Duck perfectly capture the volcanic energy of the decade's lawlessness while the musical track is pitch perfect, running the gamut from the Dead Kennedys to the Circle Jerks. One of the best scenes in the play has the two actors facing the audience spitting out the possible names for their band growing more and more offensive before finding the best (worse?) name in a rush of orgasmic delight.

Despite all the volatile mayhem, they're still two scared little boys struggling to grow up. Mickey starts to fall for Sue Giki (a suitably disdainful Carrie Kawa) a young Asian girl thought to be the school slut. Duck falls (of sorts) for Chris Sawtelle (a menacing Matt Burns), a stereotypical leather jacked thug of the era. Both relationships end badly with Duck especially destroyed ("there's nothing out there, man, you are alone"). In a heartstopping closing, Mickey and Duck slow dance in a homoerotic embrace under a mirror ball with McCallum perfectly capturing the intense bonding inherent in male teenage friendship. An emotional parting between the two boys brings with it the harbinger of the disillusionment of adulthood. Both Anfanger and Zagen are terrifically gifted pulling off the delicate feat of portraying young male anxiety without a misstep. punkplay is a dizzying display of testosterone talent.



Friday, June 12, 2009

Punkplay

Punkplay, the first of three plays in the “summerworks” festival at the Ohio Theatre, is an exciting, ferocious new play by Gregory Moss, transcending its subjects of punk, the 80s, and adolescence to form a kind of intense and meaningful fever dream, an ode to individuality and, for all adults struggling to make sense of their youth, a nostalgic and insightful look back.

Reviewed by Max Rosen

Punkplay, an excellent new play by Gregory Moss being presented as part of the Clubbed Thumb’s “summerworks” festival, is much more complex, introspective, and intelligent than it sounds. In the hands of a less exciting writer, the story of two boys in



(Zegen and Anfanger, photo c/o Carl Skutsch)

80s America discovering punk rock in the shadow of the Cold War might have degenerated into any of a number of inferior plays--losing itself, say, in meaningless apocalyptic fantasies or T.S. Elliott rants (about darkness and decay and subversion), or happily devolving into a nostalgic ode to punk fandom. Instead, Moss's play transcends the obvious traps of its subject: it is neither a meaningless exercise in apocalyptic fantasy nor a nostalgic episode of energetic but empty fandom, but a complex, atomic play--never for a moment clichéd, simple, or meaningless. When *Punkplay* flirts with the apocalypse, as it often does, it does so for specific and important reasons; when its characters choose punk, they do so as part of a powerful statement about the nature of cultures and counter-cultures, freedom and control. Directed with insight and passion by Davis McCallum and acted with sincerity and energy by Alex Anfanger, Michael Zegen, Carie Kawa, and Matt Burns, *Punkplay* is an adult play with the energy of an adolescent fever dream: brimming with life, Moss's work surrounds its protagonists with puppets, surrealist sequences, intense punk rock interludes, three-dimensional characters, violent and virulent language, and a powerful and compassionate analysis of the rarity of true individualism, the whole chaotic and mesmerizing whirlwind forming into a fabric of hormonal urgency that, like the play's intensity, is a metaphor for adolescence itself.

If that all sounds very abstract and intellectual, it is and it isn't. At its core, *Punkplay* is a coming of age tale—an extremely funny, and appropriately awkward one. It begins in the Spring (as symbolized by the word “Spring” on the wall of Mickey’s room, one of several such signs delineating objects as “porn” or “records”). Mickey (Zegen), a middle-class suburban kid, meets Duck (Anfanger)—the proverbial, world-wise subversive. After running away from home (after a disagreement with his father, or because Duck finds glamour in being an outcast), Duck moves in with Mickey. As the seasons go by, Duck becomes, in his own mind, a beacon of enlightenment; he disparages Mickey’s consumer culture and offers him (or really pressures him into accepting) its antithesis—punk rock. Duck is oppressive and often nasty—he indicts everything in Mickey’s life he doesn’t understand or like as not “punk enough,” including Mickey’s taste in girls, music, and fashion.

The boy's dynamic, often shrouded in energy or homoeroticism, but never forgotten by the playwright, is established at the very beginning of the play: the first time Duck enters Mickey’s room, he criticizes it for not being anti-conformist enough (full of, say, rock pictures and signs of entropy), and Mickey responds that he keeps it that way because he “likes it clean.” To Duck, individuality is subverting an individual’s own desires or self to a counter-culture—to Mickey, it is less defined than that but far more individual—a quieter embrace of personal taste that asks for no confirmation from the outside world. These takes on individuality define the two characters: Duck is angry and insecure, and his love of punk and supposed hatred of America is increasingly dogmatic, whereas Mickey is more genuine and open, and increasingly confused as to why everyone is always trying to tell him how to act.

As the play continues, Duck becomes meaner and more controlling as Mickey begins to understand the nature of the rules of “punk”—as Mickey, in effect, grows up, leaving the simplicity, artificial safety, and ultimately fear of Duck’s world behind—and the play builds well to its inevitable confrontation. When Mickey finally rejects Duck’s oppressive adherence to the “punk lifestyle,” he does more than simply question why he is expected to submit to unwritten, totalitarian rules (the fabric of societies, of the American 80s, and certainly, of high schools)—he questions whether or not punk is really subversive at all, striking out at the idea of “counter-culturalism” itself. “You talk just like them” Mickey says to Duck, referring to the “jocks” and the “cheerleaders”: the language of punk, at least for Duck, is just as homophobic, just as repressed, just as boring, in effect, as the 80s family values it pretends to despise. As Mickey finally steps into the real world (as symbolized by a clever, if strange theatrical usage of roller skates), he does so by rejecting the false security of conformity and dogma—whether it wears a polo shirt or the glam moniker of a punk rocker.

Broadly, Moss’s play is a coming of age story for Mickey, a funny, sexual, earnest play that hides violent and powerful truths just beneath its innocent and entertaining exterior. And, yet the play is about more than Duck or Mickey. The 80s, Moss suggests at the beginning of the play, are like the grundle of America

(caught between the balls and the asshole, so to speak). But, though he says it in a clever and irreverent way, what Moss really means is that the 80s are the collective *adolescence* of modern America, and in this respect, the play is not just a coming of age for Mickey, but a coming of age for American society itself. The play, witty and fun as it is, hides patches of darkness at its edges—Moss packs in allusions to the cold war, a reference to the AIDs crisis, virulent homophobia—and any student of modern history knows that soon the internet will tear holes in the claustrophobic little white box of Mickey’s room, its only avenue to the world a tiny television set that, tuned correctly, peeks out at the Soviet Union with childlike innocence. The 80s, a time of dogmatic family values and equally dogmatic counter-cultures, will soon close with dramatic changes in American society, and violent revelations. And this connection, between the classic coming of age story, and America’s coming of age, is perhaps the smartest and subtlest revelation of Moss’s play. For even as the play lures its audience in with its clever lines, its feverish sexcapades, and its nostalgia for the dark ages before the internet transformed the innocence of Mickey and Duck into an anachronism, Moss’s work, like adolescence, like the 80s, hides beneath its surface violent truths on the verge of ripping the comforting fabric of childhood asunder. Go see it, while you can.

Punkplay (1:40 minutes)

Clubbed Thumb @ Ohio Theatre (66 Wooster Street) Tickets: theatermania.com or 212-352-3101: \$18, (Students, \$15) Performances (through 6/13): Mon-Sun (except Wed.) 8:00 pm

Spring-Snack-Record grooves into the Ohio with Clubbed Thumb's Punkplay

Suzanna Bowling

June 14, 12:14 AM

I have the flu so I sent Elissa Benes to review the Ohio Theatre production of Punkplay for me. Here is her review:



Michael Zegan and Alex Anfanger

A white washed set, akin to an uninhabited dorm room, is your first glimpse of Clubbed Thumb's Punkplay. The open space of the Ohio Theatre accommodates itself wonderfully to suit the needs of this raunchy, 1980's view of teens in America, shrewdly directed by Davis

McCallum. A recorded voice immediately puts us into the mindset, closing with a riotous and unprintable image. The main characters, Ducky and Mickey, are best friends. They zoom around stage on roller-skates, which serves, as a precise visual representation of the theme of the play, angry American youth searching for it's niche in the world. Ducky, a rebel who has just been kicked out of the house, for not following dad's rules, asks Mickey, an innocent outsider, trying to

fit in, if he can stay at his house for a while. These roles, keenly realized by Alex Anfanger, who brings Ducky alive with truth, fear and the fight that lives in the American teen, and Michael Zegen who brings authenticity to his portrayal of Mickey whose big emotions scare, fuel and irk the shy boy next door. The friendship goes through stages that reveal their angst: punk music, outrageous outfits from safety pins to spray paint, and experiments in sadomasochism. As Mickey and Ducky: The white paper walls of their room transform, and are filled with graffiti and posters, reflecting how they feel.

Questions of sexuality are a constant theme, as jokes are aimed at Mickey, whom the others imply is gay. The problems between Ducky and Mickey intensify and ignite as other characters are brought in. Sue, who Mickey likes and whose quirkiness and awkward moments are made vividly real by Carrie Kawa, causes the most commotion. The two protagonists drift apart, as a result of Ducky's disregard of Mickey's feelings, which in turn brings about his own downfall. The arrival of Chris Sawtelle, whose grungy and self centered attitude are so precisely captured by Matt Burns, who plays several disruptive characters, brings about the Denouement.

Ultimately Punkplay is about fitting in, finding out who you are, and accepting oneself. One character runs away, the other fights back, remaining an outsider because he knows it's his truth. One follows the American nightmare: the other breaks free.

punkplay

nytheatre.com review**Heather Lee Rogers** June 9, 2009

Gregory Moss's *punkplay* is fun, insightful, and jagged around the edges. The action can appear out of nowhere and then swerves away when you think you know what's coming next. It can be a little confusing at times, but like that ratty Sex Pistols shirt my friend wore out in high school, I'm guessing the rips were put there on purpose.

The best thing about *punkplay* is the fine work done by the two lead actors: Alex Anfanger (as Duck) and Michael Zegen (as Mickey). Duck begins the play as a rebellious, scared kid whose father just kicked him out of the house. He asks to stay with Mickey, his more straitlaced and naïve friend. Scene by scene we watch these kids slowly morph into punk rockers together. They change their looks, they form a band, their characters evolve. This transition is engineered brilliantly by both Anfanger and Zegen and infused with royal helpings of heart, insecurity, teen angst, and pubescent uncertainty. Their friendship is very rocky and often hurtful and both actors do very rich, believable, and hilarious work.

Of course, they have a wealth of good material to work with. Moss's script is full of brilliant dialogue (example, Mickey explains to Duck that an IUD is a test you take so you don't have to finish high school). Bullies, the mysteries of sex, and the tricky negotiations of teen friendship are all paraded out in weird, unexpected, and funny ways. As the boys transform into punk rockers, Mickey's room transforms as well (innovated by set designer Lee Savage).

VENUE

Ohio Theatre

OPENED

June 7, 2009

CLOSED

June 13, 2009

CAST

Michael Zegen, Alex Anfanger, Matt Burns, Carie Kawa

DIRECTOR

Davis McCallum

SETS

Lee Savage

LIGHTING

Miranda K. Hardy

COSTUMES

Chloe Chapin

SOUND

Dave Malloy

FIGHT DIRECTOR

Tracy Bersley

PUPPETS

Kathleen Tobin

AUTHOR

Gregory Moss

STAGE MANAGER

Danielle Monica Long

PRODUCER

Clubbed Thumb

But I was a little distracted by broken expectations regarding the role of music as I enjoyed the show. When I read the publicity synopsis about two teen boys discovering punk rock, I expected a scene where they listen to the music and it blows their minds. I kept waiting gleefully for the big mythic "aha" moment of "This is IT!!" There is, in fact, a voiceover intro to the play that describes a scenario much like what I anticipated. But for Duck and Mickey, if there is a precise turning point, it isn't shared with the audience.

However, another angle of the play is that punk rock can sometimes be...well, not so much about the actual music from which it claims inspiration. It can be a fashion statement, an anarchist state of mind, or an effort to distinguish oneself as more individual than that despised status quo. So punk rock music, which I expected to drive through the play like a jackhammer, is loudly absent and only used to accessorize scene transitions and costume changes (neatly integrated into the world by director Davis McCallum). From press materials I learned that the "Track Listing" of song titles in the program is supposed to tell us that each scene represents a song, like on a mixtape, but we don't actually hear those songs (unless a snippet is used for transition). For better or worse, the play made me noticeably hungry for the music it held back.

In short, *punkplay* is more complex than I expected. But it wouldn't be a Clubbed Thumb production without something to grapple with. The plays they produce must be funny, strange, and provocative. *punkplay* is hilarious—no matter what else you take away from it, unless you somehow skipped your teenage years, you will definitely laugh a lot. It is not the play I thought it would be and it is told in an often challenging way. Like a good song, don't expect everything to get explained or make sense. But this is what makes Clubbed Thumb's productions so unique, and after all, behaving out of order is so much more punk rock.

Clubbed Thumb's Summerworks Strikes a Chord With "punkplay"

By Jacob Gallagher-Ross

published: June 10, 2009

Carl Skutsch



Not working for the clampdown: Michael Zegen and Alex Anfanger in "punkplay."

Details:

punkplay

By Gregory Moss

Ohio Theatre

66 Wooster Street, 212-352-3101

It's 1985, and Reagan's "morning in America" is proving to be a jittery hangover. Greed rules Wall

Street; nukes chafe in their silos. In a suburban bedroom, two teenage boys discover punk rock's righteous fury.

Gregory Moss's "punkplay"—which kicks off Clubbed Thumb's 2009 Summerworks program—follows pubescent anti-heroes Duck and Mickey through a fraught year, as they tune in, get angry, and grow up hemmed in by Reagan's America. Skimming the stage on rollerskates, their stumbling suggests both youthful floundering and the era's uncertainty.

In staccato scenes inspired by punk anthems—the program provides a "track listing"—Moss captures the clammy intensity of adolescent bonding: arousal by contraband porn; battles over

band names; preening in search of authenticity. For Duck, punk's rejections become dogma; for Mickey, they foster freethinking. Lee Savage's set embodies this metamorphosis, vibrant posters supplanting sterile whiteness.

Moss and director Davis McCallum conjure astonishments. During a Robitussin-induced fantasia, Mickey, egged on by his suddenly loquacious furniture, loses his cherry to a temptress in a Reagan mask—political satire meets Pee-wee's Playhouse. Later, the duo's hormonal tussling slips into a slow-dancing lip-lock communicating unspoken love. As the boys, Alex Anfanger and Michael Zegen deftly balance gawkiness and lyricism.

In an eloquent coda, Mickey sheds his rollerskates—grounded at last.

The New York Times

THEATER REVIEW | 'TELETHON'

Group-Home Therapy, at a Doughnut Shop



From left, Andrew Weems, Birgit Huppuch and Greg Keller in "Telethon."

By NEIL GENZLINGER
Published: June 24, 2009

It's hard to make a play that's both scalding and beautiful, but Kristin Newbom's "Telethon" at the Ohio Theater qualifies, especially in the pitch-perfect staging it is being given by Clubbed Thumb to close its Summerworks festival.

Ms. Newbom is in delicate territory with this blazingly original look at a group home for adults with physical and intellectual disabilities: a playwright asks an audience to laugh at people in wheelchairs at her own peril. But instead of mocking or exploiting the disabled characters, she does them a tremendous service by treating them as real people, no kid gloves necessary.

That she pulls this off is especially remarkable because the characters spend the play's three scenes in ridiculous garb. We meet them — three residents of the home, two staff members — at a Dunkin' Donuts, where they convene, still in their outlandish costumes, after [Halloween](#), Christmas and Easter fund-raisers to count their money and trade wisecracks.

The two staff members, Scott and Ann (played expertly by Greg Keller and Christina Kirk) set the tone both for the characters' chatter and for the audience, talking with their charges rather than down to them and reacting matter-of-factly to even the most scandalous outbursts from the three — just as professional caregivers would in real life.

The three other actors — Andrew Weems, Birgit Huppuch and Debargo Sanyal — are just as skilled: utterly convincing and quickly erasing the "I'm a performer pretending to be disabled" taint such roles often carry.

As for the story, this is where Ms. Newbom and the director, Ken Rus Schmoll, show that it's possible to be delicate while being in-your-face. Underneath the brash dialogue, this is a tale of something resembling a family, with all its ups and downs.

"Telethon" continues through Saturday at the Ohio Theater, 66 Wooster Street, SoHo;



Theater Review (NYC): *Telethon* by Kristin Newbom

Author: [Jon Sobel](#) — Published: Jun 23, 2009 at 6:53 am

Five humans, all with troubles, assemble at a Dunkin' Donuts wearing Halloween costumes. After raising money for their group home for the disabled, the three residents and two staffers coalesce into a bickering but affectionate group. On some level, as playwright Kristin Newbom demonstrates, the disabled and the staffers aren't so different. But that's about as much of a moral as can be extracted from the three scenes that comprise this compact one-act; Newbom's witty script is about as un-preachy as a play can get.

In large measure, the play is about money. First, it's physically present -- the tables are covered with the dollar bills our heroes have raised and are counting. In fact, counting the money is the silent breathing action behind the play's dialogue. Second, money is constantly presenting itself in the abstract, as the characters worry about the group home's funding, their own financial situations, and whether they can take a dollar from the pile to buy a cup of coffee.

It's all very funny -- bordering on the absurd, yet believable and touching. Jerry (Andrew Weems), who walks with crutches, is a philosophizing motormouth whose rampant fabricating hides a well of loneliness. Wheelchair-bound Shelly (Birgit Huppuch) gets a lot of the biggest laughs with a stream of innocent non sequiturs; revealing some of the circumstances of her life in quick, unexpected darts, she's the exposed heart of this makeshift family. Gary (Debargo Sanyal), who has a severe neuromuscular dystrophy and uses a motorized wheelchair, hardly says anything out loud, but we do learn, in a quite startling way, what has been occupying the mind inside his uncooperative body.

The staffers are in sadder states than their charges. Scott (Greg Keller), outwardly a handsome young man, suffers from crippling anxiety that leaves him hyperventilating and feeling like a "barren landscape" with a fire in his belly. Lonely Ann (Christina Kirk), a single mother, fights off creditors while nursing an unrequited crush on Scott.

The cast shines, Ken Rus Schmoll directs smoothly, and Kirche Leigh Zeile's costumes are hilarious. But the real star of this show is the sparkling script. Ms. Newbom has a surefire sense of rhythm. Watching this play is like listening to a brilliant piece of music executed with precision and filled with surprises.

Telethon, the third and final play of [Clubbed Thumb's](#) Summerworks 2009, closes June 27.



Telethon

Clubbed Thumb Summerworks Festival at Ohio Theater

June 23, 2009

Reviewed by VanLoan

vanloan@nyconstage.org

When the lights come up on Kristen Newbom's play *Telethon*, the last in this year's Clubbed Thumb Festival, five people are seated at a table in Halloween costumes (clown, skeleton, fairy princess, etc.). We soon realize that two if not three of the adult masqueraders are physically or mentally handicapped. The humorous beginning turns a little confusing if not downright queasy as we try to get our dramatic bearing. Surprisingly and most gratefully, the talented Newbom allows us to become enthralled with and ultimately moved by this band of misfits.



L-R) Andrew Weems, Birgit Huppuch, Greg Keller
Photo: Carl Skutch

The two group leaders Scott (Greg Keller) and Ann (the always fascinating Christina Kirk) work at a home for the disabled and have just returned to count the proceeds from an outdoor fund raiser. Their three charges Jerry (Andrew Weems) the clown, Gary (Debargo Sanyal) the fairy princess and Shelly

(Birgit Huppuch) the skeleton all are wound up from a day outside the facility. The table is at a Dunkin' Donuts where presumably little notice of the group will be taken. The loud banter and outrageous (of sorts) behavior is taken in stride by Scott and Ann. A short blackout allows the scene to be

changed to Christmas then later followed by Easter. All the scenes take place in the appropriate seasonal costumes and at the same Dunkin' Donuts (since we have become prepared for the set-up, the ensemble in Easter bunny outfits draws the biggest laughs).

As we watch the recurring post-fund raiser countdowns, we realize that Ms. Newbom's wants us to accept the group as a sort of dysfunctional family. As the pseudo-parents, Scott and Ann bicker, flirt and gossip over work related situations. As the "children", Jerry, Gary and Shelly while obviously a bit more than the usual handful slowly ingratiate themselves into our consciousness. What propels the play out of that dismal "disease of the week" category however, is Newbom's clever handling of the potentially, politically incorrect-ness of the situation. Her dialogue is crisp, sharp and never condescends to her characters. Scott and Ann take the 'antics' of the disabled trio in stride even making good natured fun of them to their faces. While at times shocking (both intentionally and not), the trio seems to know how much they can 'get away with' and are suitably remorseful when chastised. The emotionally charged situations provoke both laughter and melancholy simultaneously. The author is blessed with a top-notch production team. Director Ken Rus Schmoll (recent Obie winner for his direction of **Telephone**) keeps a firm hand on the sensibility of the piece knowing which scenes to heighten without allowing any sentimentality to creep in. Costumer designer Kirche Leigh Zelle brings just the right amount of levity to her work. But it's really the actors who steal our hearts. All of them are superb finding both touching and obnoxious nuances in their characters (personally, I was taken with Sanyal's gay paraplegic in his motorized wheelchair). The elegiac final scene seems totally appropriate; an admiring but never patronizing look at a disabled but never disenfranchised family.

Telethon

This new play is part of Clubbed Thumb's Summerworks Festival. This description is from the company: "After each of their seasonal ad-hoc fundraising drives, the staff and patients of a group home for the disabled meet at Dunkin' Donuts to celebrate, detox, squabble, and flirt. Out of their savage camaraderie, something like a family begins to emerge."



Pictured: Andrew Weems, Birgit Huppuch, and Greg Keller in a scene from Telethon (photo © Carl Skutsch)

nytheatre.com review

Loren Noveck · June 22, 2009

A werewolf, a pirate, a clown, a skeleton, and a fairy princess sit at a Dunkin' Donuts at the opening of Kristin Newbom's *Telethon*. It's Halloween, of course, but from the outset it's clear that something more involved than a night of trick-or-treat has just happened. The werewolf and the pirate are dumping piles of money out of their plastic pumpkins; the fairy princess is a guy in an electric wheelchair; the clown isn't allowed to have coffee because it causes seizures; and the skeleton (also in a wheelchair) is just a little bit off in all her emotional coloration.

It soon becomes apparent that Gary (the fairy), Shelly (the skeleton), and Jerry (the clown) are residents at a home for the disabled, and Ann (pirate) and Scott (werewolf) are two of their caretakers, out with their charges after some sort of fundraising event. In addition to their physical disabilities, Jerry lies compulsively and Shelly fixates on objects and conversational topics; Gary, the most severely physically disabled, can barely speak at all without the help of a computer voice simulator (like scientist Stephen Hawking uses). Ann and Scott, while not physically disabled, have troubles of their own: Ann is a single parent estranged from her father and sister and buried in debt; Scott is lonely, divorced, and prone to panic attacks.

VENUE

Ohio Theatre

OPENED

June 21, 2009

CLOSES

June 27, 2009

PERFORMANCES

Jun 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27 at 8pm

TICKETS

\$18.00

212-353-3101

[Order tickets online](#)

SPECIAL TICKET PRICES

Students: \$15

CAST

Birgit Huppuch, Greg Keller, Christina Kirk, Debargo Sanyal, Andrew Weems

DIRECTOR

Ken Rus Schmoll

SETS

Sue Rees

LIGHTING

Garin Marschall

COSTUMES

Kirche Leigh Zeile

SOUND

Leah Gelpe

VIDEO

Leah Gelpe

AUTHOR

Kristin Newbom

PRODUCER

Clubbed Thumb

And as the basic setup of the scene repeats itself with only a change of holiday—Christmas brings Nativity costumes and a shift from cider to eggnog on the projected Dunkin' Donuts menu; Easter brings bunny suits—and tiny, occasionally touched-on changes in circumstance, it also becomes apparent that these are people with no one to turn to but one another. It may not be the social circle or the family that any of them would have imagined for themselves, but it's what they have and what they make the best of.

Not a lot happens here; these aren't characters with dramatic story arcs or shocking plot twists within the time frame of the play. (Or, rather, the things that happen aren't what we see on stage.) The action is in the small moments between characters, often portrayed obliquely, the little—often terribly sad—revelations and epiphanies that they share, both hilarious (Jerry's heartfelt recitation of his "poem" about "emotions" that's actually an Aerosmith song) and horrifying (Shelly making Pixie Stix dust out of someone's remains). Many moments could easily tip over into mockery if acted or directed at all broadly, but the entire cast (especially Birgit Huppuch as Shelly, always sincere and passionate and completely un-self-conscious) and director Ken Rus Schmoll keep the emotional connections vivid and grounded throughout.

Although the play is often extremely funny, Newbom's writing has wells of sadness and loneliness, not very far under the surface, bubbling up here and there—Scott's moments of completely losing his grip; genuine medical emergencies that Ann and Scott aren't really equipped to cope with; Gary's sudden outburst of uncontrollable weeping—but also spots of unexpected grace, like a poem that Gary works away at on his voice-simulator computer throughout the entire Christmas scene.

And the play ends with a nostalgic coda, a voiceover against a home movie of a small-town Fourth of July—closing out the year and heading back toward Halloween—that tries to encapsulate in a monologue how people meet, connect, lose one another, and move on with nothing but memories. It's a beautiful piece of writing that may overplay its hand in laying out the themes of the play.

One of my favorite short stories, by Lorrie Moore, describes a character this way: "She hadn't been given the proper tools to make a real life with, she decided, that was it. She'd been given a can of gravy and a hairbrush and told, 'There you go.'" That line reminds me of this play: full of people wanting so badly to connect, and yet scarcely equipped to survive in the world, the caretakers as much as—or in different ways from—the taken-care-of.