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THE Measure

THEATER Summerworks 2011: Cross-Class Sorcery in *Enfrascada*

Posted by [Benjamin Sutton](#) on Tue, Jun 7, 2011 at 1:02 PM



In the opening moments of Tanya Saracho's *Enfrascada*—having its premiere as part of Clubbed Thumb's **Summerworks 2011** festival, and running through June 11—we get a glimpse of idyllic, even utopian cross-class friendship, as Alicia (Flora Diaz), Carolina (Anna Lamadrid) and Yesina (Jessica Pimentel) sit down to enjoy an outdoor concert in rural Wisconsin. Saracho's funny and effective expository scene has the Chicagoan best friends articulating their upper-, middle- and working-class cultural values in jokes about Justin Bieber, footwear and the price of bottled water. But when Alicia gets up to call her fiancé Diego, the trio's stable positions begin to falter.

Alicia—the most culturally "white" of the three leads—moves out after discovering that her currently unemployed partner of nine years has been having an affair, and that the other woman has actually moved into their apartment (for which Alicia pays). She crashes with her quirky, quote-happy academic cousin Lulu (Christina Pumariega) and, caving to Carolina and Yesina's pleas, consults with a Señora who provides her with the ingredients for a spell to send the home-wrecker packing and get Diego back. This formula involves a jar full of honey and cinnamon, and Steven C. Kemp's set design of shelf-fulls of jars foreshadows that there will be many more, as Alicia becomes increasingly desperate for more drastic magic to set everything right.

Like an Almodovar film, *Enfrascada* is rooted in emotional realism while allowing for moments of magic, superstition and haunting. Visits to the three psychic-clairvoyant-sorcerer women (all played superbly by Annie Henk) never approach mockery or even total disbelief, while maintaining an air of cautious skepticism that slowly dissolves. When the final Señora warns of the extreme nature of the work Alicia has demanded, the air of danger and gloom becomes palpable.

Along this journey from harmless, mostly cathartic spells to black magic and voodoo, the relationships between the four main characters—with Lulu now brought into the fold—never cease to develop. Saracho and director Jerry Ruiz do a terrific job balancing the group comedy—which veers ever more towards slapstick during late stakeout and cemetery visit scenes without ever becoming unbelievable—with Alicia's ongoing decent into vengeful sorcery. The cast is unanimously excellent, whether constantly hat-switching—as is the case for Henk and Pumariega—or giving nuance and revealing new layers familiar melodrama types like the upper-middle-class housewife (Carolina), or the hedonistic young professional (Yesina). The title, "Enfrascada," has a double meaning as both "bottled" (as in a jar) and "engrossed," as Alicia becomes with her superstitious pursuits. It also describes the experience of seeing this very funny, well executed and sharp play.

Enfrascada continues at **HERE Arts Center** through Saturday night. Check back here the next two Tuesdays for reviews of the other shows—**Our Lot** (June 12-18) and **Civilization (all you can eat)** (June 19-25)—in **Clubbed Thumb's** Summerworks 2011 festival of new plays.





Seeking Answers About the Future to Live in the Present

Wednesday, June 8th, 2011

by **Alix Cohen** on **Playing Around**

Enfrascada—to be totally absorbed (in)

Alicia (Flora Diaz), Carolina (Anna Lamadrid), and Yesenia (Jessica Pimentel) are die-hard friends. They're young, hip, libidinous Spanish American women in short skirts and complicated high heels. Carolina and Yesenia, tend to speak in street vernacular and, in the play, sometimes in Spanish. When Diego, Alicia's boyfriend of nine years cheats on her, she moves in with an odd duck cousin, Lulu (Christina Pumareiga), who quotes Aristophanes and becomes the fourth *musketeer*, *i.e.* the one who's unnecessary and glib.

Lulu has her cousin at yoga and in therapy in an effort to alleviate the pain and stress of being abandoned. Alicia's other friends insist she go to a Senora (priestess/chemist) as they're accustomed to doing in times of upheaval, to exact revenge or, at least see what the future holds. Alicia has no interest in revenge, she just wants her man back; nor does she believe in what she perceives as mumbo jumbo. Tired and in despair, however, she agrees...successively visiting Brujeria, Santeria and Hoodoo Senoras in their tenement apartments. Each interprets her situation accurately, warns her of consequences, and ultimately assigns concoctions to make and spells to carry out. Somewhere along the way, despite revelations about Diego's behavior, Alicia loses perspective becoming obsessed.



Flora Diaz (above) takes the grounded Alicia on an unwitting journey. As her character's skepticism crumbles in direct proportion to the unlikelihood of success, Diaz allows us to see the entire process. When secrets about Alicia's relationship come out, we realize the truth has been part of her behavior all along. After shenanigans of the last scene, her control of an emotionally wrought resolution is transfixing.

Jessica Pimentel (Yesenia) embodies the feisty, charismatic, sexual libertarian she plays. Her anger is palpable, her loyalty unquestionable, her approach to life a full frontal attack. Pimentel moves like a hip hop dancer and flashes those eyes as if they were weapons. This is a fully realized character.

Anna Lamadrid (Carolina) is clearly part comedienne. Her naturally sweet if somewhat foggy Carolina reminds me of a slightly more fragile Billie Dawn (from *Born Yesterday*). Not that the role is played for laughs. Lamadrid offers us a real woman, one whose attributes are recognizable and familiar.

Both Christina Pumareiga and Annie Henk have solid moments as supporting players. Pumareiga's women visiting the Senoras look like deer caught in headlights. Her Lulu is nicely salty. Henk is ably focused, though she regresses into caricature during the first of her three roles.

Director, Jerry Ruiz has a real feeling for the girlfriends. Each has her own idiosyncrasies. Relationships are apparent. It's easy to imagine their lives. Alicia's growing obsession is well crafted and filled with nuance. Staging is effective and visually pleasing, though the set is pedestrian.

Emily DeAngelis (Costumes) does a bang up job of evoking the girls' approach to life with their clothing.

This is an interesting character piece. The first scene reveals information a little too slowly causing confusion, but by the second, we're curious. When Alicia submits to her first Senora, interest is peaked and by the time she starts to carry out the spells, we're hooked. Though the idea of a modern girl getting wrapped up in the world of spirits is intriguing and her progression believable, it's the girls who make it work: sassy, spitfire Jessie (Yesenia), slightly ditzy Cara (Carolina), and pragmatic, deadpan Lulu are quite a group. Only excessive untranslated Spanish (it made me crazy when others in the audience laughed at something I didn't understand) kept it from being *entirely* successful. Still, I knew what was being implied, the ensemble cast is good, and the dialogue is filled with vitality.



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THE Measure

THEATER Summerworks 2011: Unwanted Inheritance and Undying Sibling Rivalries in *Our Lot*

Posted by [Benjamin Sutton](#) on Tue, Jun 14, 2011 at 1:48 PM



(Photo: Carl Skutsch)

The titular "lot" in Kristin Newbom and W. David Hancock's *Our Lot*—having its premiere at the **HERE Arts Center** through June 18 as part of Clubbed Thumb's **Summerworks 2011** festival—refers to many things throughout the very funny magical realist comedy. Most literally, it's the property that three siblings are planning to sell following their step-father Karl's death.

It's Karl's encyclopedic collection of fake and ridiculous celebrity mementos packed into big plastic bins, which Kathy, Alice and Stig (Joanna P. Adler, Mariann Mayberry, Paul Neibanck), along with Kathy's partner Toby (Nathan Hinton), spend the entire play unpacking from the backyard shed and throwing away. It's the broader lot of life, of suffering and losing, finding happiness and comfort, a lot all three siblings expect will improve with the sale of Karl's house. And it's **Lot**, the Bible character who fled Sodom with his family and couldn't look back.

The siblings' banter-filled dialogue, marked by corrective interjections from wheelchair-bound Iraq vet Toby, comes in ebbs and flows. Director **May Adrales** manages these shifting rhythms very well, building the script's comic sections up to frenzied climaxes and then, at the drop of an injurious comment or backhanded remark, bringing a hushed tension over the group's razor-sharp disputes.

Kathy, the bossy elder, is usually at the center of these, but Adler makes a point of showing the character's warmth, humor and fleeting affection so that she never becomes a villain. Alice, the diplomat of the group, responds to Karl's funny, fabricated historical artifacts with greater sentimentality. A forgery of Jacqueline Kennedy's pink, blood-splattered dress reminds her of their long-gone mother's pink dress; she optimistically digs for clues in a bin marked "Lennin" because their mother left the night John Lennon was shot. Toby bursts her bubble: "That's Vladimir not John." Stig, a thirty-something boy genius developmentally frozen after an unnamed accident at age 14, sports an eye patch and knocks the group's dynamic off-kilter whenever it begins to settle. "You know that store in the mall, Forever 21?" He asks Toby, Neibanck giving the joke a perverse kind of glee. "It's like I'm forever 14."

Moments of intense anger, sadness and confusion interrupt the absurd humor of the slightly surreal setting with its ark-like collection of celebrity bins (Elvis, Reagan, Nixon, Darwin, Disney, Jacques Cousteau, John Wayne and so on), bright green grass, picket fence and hazmat suits—protection against a bee hive they're about to bomb. However exaggerated or distorted these fights may seem—Alice maliciously announces: "Kathy gets nauseous every time she hears a certain song by Duran Duran," prompting a search for the offending track—they have all the conflicted and self-destructive shading of every family fight. Newbom and Hancock keep raising the emotional stakes until humor, anger and violence all overlap and cancel each other out in a calm, powerful finale right out of Norse mythology that isn't nearly so random or disproportionate as it sounds.

Our Lot continues at **HERE Arts Center** through Saturday night. Check back here the next review of **Civilization (all you can eat)** (June 19-25), the final show in Clubbed Thumb's 2011 festival of new plays, and **click here** for a review of the first, **Enfrascada**.

Our Lot

nytheatre.com review archive

nytheatre.com review

[Heather Lee Rogers](#) · June 14, 2011

I love the title of the play *Our Lot*, by Kristin Newbom and W. David Hancock in Clubbed Thumb's Summerworks series. According to the dictionary, a "lot" can mean the drawing of objects (like straws) to decide something, a portion of inheritance, a piece of land or property, the life one's been dealt by fortune, and also a great amount of something. All meanings apply significantly to this fine-spun and complex play.

In *Our Lot* three grown siblings reunite in the wake of their stepfather Karl's death to clear out the house and property. When the play begins they have moved into the backyard to begin clearing out a shed that has been stuffed with plastic storage bins, each with the name of a different historical person on it (like Einstein, Jackie Kennedy, John Wayne, etc.). Each plastic bin holds various worthless items that their stepfather thought was important or symbolic to that person's life. And there are a LOT of them. At times they cover the entire stage (brilliantly designed by Timothy R. Mackabee). The shed has to be cleared out and bug-bombed by midnight according to the bank. This simple, physical activity brilliantly comprises the structure of the entire play.

Kathy, the younger sister, does the bulk of the work, grimly trying to empty all the boxes into a large green dumpster without getting caught up in the past they contain. Kathy has brought her boyfriend Toby, a war vet in a wheelchair whom she met in Alcoholics Anonymous. Alice, her older sister gets distracted easily; she wants to live in the sentimental memories of her childhood and is more interested in cracking why the boxes are significant than the approaching bank deadline. Their



Pictured: Paul Niebanck and Mariann Mayberry in a scene from Our Lot (photo © Carl Skutsch)

brother, Stig, is not much help either. As a notably gifted child he suffered a brain injury in an accident and, though appearing in his late 30s, he is stuck emotionally at the level of a 14-year-old and is cared for in a group home where he lives. Stig is the only one of the siblings to have liked their stepfather at all. He maintains that their stepfather did not die of cancer last week but rather of poetry, "a tropical disease", which he "picked up over in 'Nam.... He met a guy there who had a book of poems. Karl read the poems and they infected his soul." Their mother, who suffered from fits of intense rage which Kathy inherited, walked out on them thirty years ago while they were kids and has never been heard from again.

So as the siblings clean up this "lot," they are also dealing with their lots in life and their relationships to each other and their past. They haggle over the money and property. They fight over their childhood memories: what really happened, what was invented later, and how they each have a right to feel about it. As they dig through the bins it gets tense and ugly. According to Stig, their cryptic stepfather Karl maintained that "family is like an excavation site." In *Our Lot*, through the action of digging through old stuff, the siblings dig into their emotional baggage. Through the dust, junk, sweat, and bad-smelling-grime a sad family and their love for each other is revealed.

I love that for a play about throwing away garbage, this one is so ripe with moments of beauty and poetry. The cast of four are a tight and complimentary ensemble. I particularly enjoyed Paul Niebanck's inventive and fanciful work as Stig and Joanna P. Adler's work as Kathy, the wounded, defensive sister. I also appreciated the subtle and graceful way the lights brought the play from day into night (designed by Gina Scherr). Congratulations to director May Adrales and Clubbed Thumb for such a satisfying and intricate production. Catch it this week only at [HERE!](#)

Opened: June 12, 2011

Closed: June 18, 2011

Artists Involved

Cast: Joanna P. Adler, Nathan Hinton, Mariann Mayberry, Paul Niebanck

Author: Kristin Newbom and W. David Hancock

Director: May Adrales

Costumes: Alixandra Gage Englund

Lighting: Gina Scherr

Sets: Timothy R. Mackabee

Sound: Ryan Maeker

Fight Director: Lisa Kopitsky

Stage Manager: Lizzy Lee

Producer: Clubbed Thumb



Monday, June 20, 2011
THEATER: Our Lot



The moment we are born is the moment we start forgetting. It is our lot to walk through life unaware of what we've lost, or worse, as in the case of Stig (Paul Neibanck), who suffered brain damage and is now a wild, forever-fourteen-year-old adult, to remember our loss. In Kristin Newbom and W. David Hancock's engrossing memory play *Our Lot*, Stig, his two sisters Kathy (Joanna P. Adler) and Alice (Mariann Mayberry), have gathered to fumigate their childhood home and throw away the boxed and labeled memories hoarded by their late step-father-slash-uncle, Karl. As with many memory-driven plays, the homefront is steeped in a miasma of misplaced miseries, which is why the youngest, Kathy, is keeping up her steely all-business front, wanting nothing more than to be done with the past. On the other hand, the selfish middle child, Alice, who "escaped" the homestead, rubs salt in old wounds by dwelling on her more rose-tinted remembrances, as desperate to save her mother's old Instamatic camera as Kathy is motivated to destroy it. These two represent the future and the present, the superego and ego, while Stig, who has never grown up and cannot control his impulses, is the group's id and its past, the boy who neither condemns the mother for leaving (Kathy) or understands (Alice), but believes that she is just around the corner, living with a second family, ready to come home and collect him. Finally, there's Kathy's wheelchair-bound boyfriend, Toby (Nathan Hinton), who provides the audience with an outsider's neutrally "know-it-all" perspective.

This may seem too carefully structured, but *Our Lot* wisely takes a casual approach to its intellectual design: the play's philosophy comes madly scrawled on the inside of long-sealed plastic storage bins or as quotes from each bin's celebrity subject, from John Wayne to Lennin [sic]. Save for an ill-advisedly mystical ending (which only even bothers to wrap up one small part of this wide-open character study), the play alternates between the aggressive joshing of The Amoralists or Adam Rapp and the relaxed solipsism of Annie Baker, Adam Bock, and other hyperrealists. Instead of wrapping riddles in nutshells, Newbom and Hancock lovingly unwrap memories: a container labeled Jackie O. contains what's supposedly the black box from John-John's downed plane; instead, it's the family's long-lost copy of *Back to the Future*, which reminds Kathy of her divorce, and, in turn, this remembered rage summons an image of their mother's "Mister Misty" fits, which culminated in her throwing the kitchen table at her husband and abandoning them. Because *Our Lot* has such a strong central action -- the need to clean the house before the bank repossesses it and penalizes them -- it's able to go off on these thought tangents while maintaining its momentum. (Director May Adrales deserves some credit for this; the stage may be cluttered, but the action is always neat.)

As part of Clubbed Thumb's annual Summerworks series, *Our Lot* is a solid entry with a talented four-person cast, particularly Adler, whose measured tightness provides the show with much of its backbone and maturity. But as a part of the entire season, *Our Lot*'s decidedly low-key approach and wide-netted structure may not be memorable enough to leave audiences with anything more than a warm impression, for while it's terrific moment to moment, those moments are, as we've learned, what we're constantly forgetting.

Civilization (All You Can Eat) Hogs It Up

By Tom Sellar Wednesday, Jun 22 2011

With a giant pig running hog-wild at its center, *Civilization (All You Can Eat)* is easily the most rambunctious of the three premieres in Clubbed Thumb's Summerworks series this year. But that's not the only reason I found it to be one of the sharper and more incisive new plays I've seen this season. Dramatist Jason Grote has an admirable knack for steering ostensibly ordinary scenes into uncomfortable territory, where people's weaknesses, selfishness, and hypocrisies get exposed.

The aforementioned Big Hog (gamely played by Tony Torn), with an insatiable appetite for violence, makes his way into the big city, where he joins Grote's cadre of depressed creative types—desperate actors, filmmakers reduced to making racist commercials, untenured professors turned self-help consultants—all wondering how everything turned out so wrong. *Civilization's* seven shell-shocked characters share a common struggle for fulfillment in an unsparingly demoralizing 2008 America—separately at first, and then together as Grote reveals their links as friends and family.



Carl Skutsch

Tony Torn gets a little piggy.

Director Seth Bockley's simple, sure-handed production features a cast remarkably in synch with the writing's social commentary and irregular rhythms. (Jeff Biehl and Melle Powers are especially strong as an interracial couple of intellectuals bewildered by their new lives as freelancers.) Wordless sequences between scenes, imaginatively choreographed by Dan Safer, suggestively reinforce the title's proposition that the smallest gestures take part in a larger human feeding-frenzy.

At times Grote's drama teeters into heartfelt but too-familiar terrain, lamenting the short supply of love and understanding in a cruel world. But the playwright can be quick to make such sentiments look pathetic or ironically naive, too. His least linear sections resonate with the darkest humor and hold the most interest. Indeed, the play scores its biggest coup when Big Hog ultimately goes corporate, revealing how baseline animal instincts get covered up by pleasantries and power suits. *Civilization* emerges from the fray as a taut and funny work, simultaneously offbeat and spot-on.