

Happy Now?



JOY REVISION
Gorman, Steve Peebles and Drew Schad, from left, reassess their contentment.



Shattered Globe Theatre (see Fringe & storefront). By Lucinda Coxon. Dir. Roger Smart. With ensemble cast. 2hrs; one intermission.

A few years ago, *New York* magazine offered the somewhat unsurprising statistic that parents are far less happy than their nonparent peers. British playwright Lucinda Coxon shares this same news in *Happy Now?*, a 2008 work receiving its Chicago premiere. In an early scene, a "gay friend" describes the fun and transcendence of his weekend to two married-with-children couples, whose weekends included TV watching, kid transporting and (not enough) sleeping.

With intriguing scenic design and dynamic staging, Shattered Globe's production is impressive. But it's hard not to be occasionally annoyed by Coxon's take on middle-class marriage—including her decision, albeit practical, to keep the children offstage; they seem to have little

effect on the life of protagonist Kitty (the excellent Christina Gorman). Long before intermission, the title's question can be answered succinctly: no. Still, it's unclear why Coxon needs to indict working women. No one here is happy—not the gay friend, not the divorced dad, not Kitty's aging, hypochondriac mother. Could it be that *happy* is the wrong adjective?

This utterly derisive take on bourgeois life is delivered with a few laughs and fewer surprises. The strongest bits come at beginning and end, when Kitty encounters Michael (a charming Ben Werling) at a professional conference. He offers her no-strings-attached sex; she's clearly intrigued, continuing to think about him and this symbolic opportunity to escape her "one and only life." This is where Coxon's script feels spot-on, taking on larger questions of longing and desire. When Kitty asks her husband, Johnny (Steve Peebles), "Is this my life?" her sense of bewilderment and despair echoes universally.—*Suzanne Scanlon*

Luther



Steep Theatre Company (see Resident companies). By Ethan Lipton. Dir. Joanie Schultz. With Michael Salinas, Kendra Thulin, Peter Moore. 1hr 30mins; no intermission.

In an ill-defined alternate universe, military veterans are taken in as rehabilitation projects—or really, Ethan Lipton's metaphor suggests, as pets—by middle-class families. The opening scene of Lipton's 2012 piece establishes that aspirational urbanites Marjorie (Kendra Thulin) and Walter (Peter Moore) have given shelter to Luther (Michael Salinas), who sleeps fitfully on their couch as the couple discuss whether they should bring him to Walter's company party. It's only when Luther wakes that we see he's an adult yet strangely infantilized man sporting dog tags and the scars of war.

Bringing Luther into the corporate world of social climbing and ass-kissing



SOLDIERING ON Thulin and Moore, right, look after Salinas.

turns out to be too much for the man who served a six-year tour of duty in a war zone; he can no longer negotiate the tiresome mores of civilian life. Director Joanie Schultz's cast commits admirably to Lipton's odd world, which also includes a number of characters portrayed for no discernible reason as puppets (though the puppets' design by Chelsea Warren and operation by performer Missi Davis are impressive). Still, Lipton's attempted ironic treatment of our country's view of veterans ends up feeling just as dehumanizing as the reality, if not more.—*Kris Vire*

PHOTOS: TOP, KEVIN VIOL; BOTTOM, LEE MILLER

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