



FAIRY FOREPLAY Kane gets Tracy Michelle Arnold in a clinch.

SHOW OF THE WEEK

A Midsummer Night's Dream



Chicago Shakespeare Theater (see Fringe & storefront). By William Shakespeare. Dir. Gary Griffin. With ensemble cast. 2 hrs 25mins; one intermission.

You can't accuse Gary Griffin's busy but entertaining production of Shakespeare's comedy of being subtle. Indeed, the prologue begins with a giant projection of Sigmund Freud, gazing down at us patronizingly from the rear wall of the stage as Puck (Elizabeth Ledo in male drag) chops a giant cigar. Later, as the young lovers enter the fairies' forest, an image of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* hovers over the scene.

Cigars aside, there's little in Griffin's staging to suggest a psychosexual interpretation. The foolish mortals' romantic notions are still manipulated by the whims of fairy king Oberon (Timothy Edward Kane, gleefully channeling *SNL*'s Stefan) and his servant Puck (Ledo, rocking a shaved head and stuffed crotch). Griffin shuffles the script to

elevate the importance of the rude mechanicals, giving Quince (Tim Kazurinsky), Bottom (Ron Orbach) and pals the opening scene; kicking off with the comic relief seems an odd choice. Only after the goofballs parcel out roles in *Pyramus and Thisbe* do we come to the court of Theseus and Hippolyta, decked out in buttoned-up threads that suggest Edwardian England—call it *A Midsummer Night's Downton*.

Once we enter the forest, Griffin's production comes to lush life. Mike Tutaj's projections of magnified textures and swirling lights suggest the magic at hand, while Titania's fairies—played by the same actors who portray the mechanicals—sport striped pajamas and gaudy headaddresses worthy of *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. The lovers amusingly break out of their restraints under the influence of fairy magic, and Griffin finds some inspired bits, as when Puck slyly undresses them one by one while he puts them to sleep. If the production doesn't exactly innovate, well, sometimes a *Dream* is just a *Dream*. —Kris Vire

Listings

If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail, e-mail (theater@timeoutchicago.com) or fax (312-924-9350) to **Oliver Sava**. Include details, dates, times, address of venue with cross streets, nearest El station and bus routes, contact information, box-office phone number and admission price, if any. **Deadline is 9am Monday, ten days before publication date.**

- Reviewed in this issue
- * Recommended or notable
- ♪ Musical or song-based play
- ¢ Cheap

Touring shows

OPENING ♪ **Bring It On: The Musical** Cadillac Palace Theatre, 151 W Randolph St (800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com). Tue–Fri 7:30pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2, 7:30pm. \$18–\$140. Tue 6–Mar 25. Some of musical theater's top writing talents unite to tell the altogether frivolous story of a rivalry between two cheerleading teams.

* ♪ **The Doyle and Debbie Show** Royal George Theatre, 1641 N Halsted St (312-988-9000, doyleanddebbie.com). Thu 23–Wed 29: Wed 2, 7:30pm; Thu 7:30pm; Fri 8pm; Sat 5, 8pm; Sun 2, 6:30pm. Thu 1–Wed 7: Wed, Thu 7:30pm; Fri 8pm; Sat 5, 8pm; Sun 2, 6:30pm. \$43.50–\$49.50. 1 hr 40mins; no intermission. A seriousness of satire drives *The Doyle and Debbie Show*, a sort of live mockumentary on loan from Nashville, where it's a long-running hit. Doyle (Bruce Arntson) is a washed-up vendor of old-school country music, a small-time aspirant to the Grand Ole Opry who's on his third Debbie (Jenny Littleton). Together with their sidekick and accompanist, Buddy (Matthew Carlton), they regale us with Doyle's greatest hits: masterful parody songs with titles like "When You're Screwing Other Women (Think of Me)." Arntson delivers an expert rendition of the sequined-showman archetype, while Littleton shows off impressive vocals, evoking songstresses from Dolly Parton to Tammy Wynette. —Kris Vire

CLOSING ♪ **South Pacific** Cadillac Palace Theatre, 151 W Randolph St (800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com). Thu, Fri 7:30pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2pm. \$18–\$86. Through Feb 26. You don't have to be a cockeyed optimist to love Bartlett Sher's stirring 2008 revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's wartime musical, pulling into port in Chicago for a two-week engagement.

Resident companies

OPENING **Absolute Hell** The Gift Theatre, 4802 N Milwaukee Ave (773-283-7071, thegifttheatre.org). Previews Thu 1–Sun 4: Thu, Fri, Sun 7:30pm. Opens Mon 5 at 7:30pm. Regular run: Thu–Sat 7:30pm; Sun 2:30pm. \$20–\$30. Through Apr 29. The bohemians of the nightclub La Vie En Rose prepare to rebuild their fractured lives one month after the end of World War II in Rodney Ackland's 1987 drama. Gift ensemble member Sheldon Patinkin directs the U.S. premiere.

CLOSING ♣ **Accidental Rapture** 16th Street Theatre at Berwyn Cultural Center, 6420 16th St, Berwyn (708-795-6704,

16thstreettheater.org). Thu, Fri 7:30pm; Sat 5, 8:30pm. \$18, students \$10. Through Feb 25. Ten years after grad school, a married couple struggles to reconnect with an old friend after his religious awakening in Eric Pfeiffer's comedy.

CLOSING * **Ameriville** Victory Gardens Biograph Theatre, 2433 N Lincoln Ave (773-871-3000, victorygardens.org). Thu, Fri 7:30pm; Sat 4, 7:30pm; Sun 3pm. \$20–\$50. 1 hr 30mins; no intermission. Through Feb 26. Taking Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath as a starting place, the four members of Universes stir up a 90-minute meditation in spoken word and song on the state of America's soul. The show's pacing lags in places, and the imagery it invokes—in Yew's staging, in Brian Freeland's projections and in Universes' words—can be unsettling; at times, it may feel like an indictment of modern America. But *Ameriville* ends on a hopeful, imperative note. If the picture it paints of our modern country isn't always pretty, it encourages us to get out our brushes and paint a better one. —KV

* **Assisted Living** Profiles Theatre at The Second Stage, 3408 N Sheffield Ave (773-549-1815, profilestheatre.org). Thu, Fri 8pm; Sat 5, 8pm; Sun 5pm. \$35–\$40. 1 hr 40mins; no intermission. Through Mar 18. The vagaries of family are sharply delineated in Deirdre O'Connor's affecting new play. Anne (Stacy Stoltz) has given over the last decade or so of her life to the care of her ailing mother, having moved back into her childhood home, lost touch with friends and nearly given up on dating. Stoltz brings tremendous nuance to the way Anne's crushing sense of obligation serves double duty as shelter from living her own life. —KV

* **Bachelorette** Profiles Theatre, 4147 N Broadway (773-549-1815, profilestheatre.org). Thu, Fri 8pm; Sat 5, 8pm; Sun 7pm. \$35–\$40. 1 hr 20mins; no intermission. Through Mar 11. The night before their friend Becky's wedding, singletons Regan, Gena and Katie gather in a hotel room to drink, snort coke and kvetch about rotund Becky's mysterious marital good fortune. Leslye Headland's play works largely thanks to Hillary Marren's bombastic turn as Regan. Dressed skimpily, with hair teased like a massive wig, Marren commands the stage in a sometimes sensual, often abrasive performance of female-to-female drag. Other elements (a very current sound design by Jeffrey Levin, a cozy, realistic set by Scott Davis) help set the scene for a final showdown between Regan and Becky (the sonorous, well-timed Rakisha Pollard) that feels truly electric. —Christopher Shea

OPENING ♪ ♣ **BEST MUSICAL! A Completely Improvised Musical Comedy!** Porchlight Music Theatre at Stage 773, 1225 W Belmont Ave (773-327-5252, porchlightmusictheatre.org). Wed 8pm. \$15, students \$12. Through Mar 28. Conceived by Second City veteran Matthew Loren Cohen, this improvised musical uses audience suggestions to create a new show from scratch every night.

Blue Man Group Briar Street Theatre, 3133 N Halsted St (773-348-4000, blueman.com). Thu 8pm; Fri 7pm; Sat 4, 7, 10pm; Sun 4pm. \$49–\$69. The Briar Street has been the Chicago outpost for the indigo-hued drum corps since 1997, and it shows few signs of leaving anytime soon.

* **The Caretaker** Writers' Theatre at Books on Vernon, 664 Vernon Ave, Glencoe (847-242-6000, writers theatre.org). Thu 23–Wed 29: Tue, Wed 7:30pm; Thu, Fri 8pm; Sat 4, 8pm; Sun 2, 6pm. Thu 1–Wed 7: Tue 7:30pm; Wed 2, 7:30pm; Thu, Fri 8pm; Sat 4, 8pm; Sun 2pm. \$35–\$65. 2 hrs 20mins; one intermission. Through Mar 25. This 1960 drama showcases Harold Pinter's masterful sense of musicality, using each water droplet, footstep and offstage door slam to build suspense among flat owner Mick (Kareem Bandea), his brother Aston (Anish Jethmalani) and Davies (William J. Norris), an unwitting tramp Aston invites off the streets to stay in their