

SHOW OF THE WEEK



TEENAGE DREAMS
Matthew Fletcher, left, and Salt go full heartthrob.

Spring Awakening



Griffin Theatre (see Resident companies). Book and Lyrics by Steven Sater. Music by Duncan Sheik. Dir. Jonathan Berry. With ensemble cast. 2hrs 20mins; one intermission.

In its first Chicago-born production, Steven Sater and Duncan Sheik's electrified update of Frank Wedekind's 19th-century play retains the honesty and energy that make it such a successful portrait of timeless teen angst. The musical nimbly hops between the 1891 book scenes, in which mostly unsympathetic adults (played by Vanessa Greenway and Larry Baldacci) keep their teen German charges naive and in line, and the modern-rock songs, in which those same teens release their frustrations in very contemporary language.

Griffin's production replicates Michael Mayer's Broadway premiere a little too closely. Director Jonathan Berry and associate director Jess McLeod reconfigure the action for a much more intimate space, to be

sure. Set designer Marianna Cszasz uses an industrial feel and a runway configuration with the audience on three sides; the actors often enter among us. Where the Broadway production and its touring replica allowed some audience members the choice to sit onstage, here we're all part of the action.

But then Nicole Pellegrino's choreography, without plagiarizing Bill T. Jones's original work, often suggests it. The young actors often physically evoke the Broadway cast, and moments in Berry and McLeod's staging—such as the intertwined pose of lust-driven teens Melchior (Josh Salt) and Wendla (Aja Wiltshire) that ends Act I—seem taken verbatim.

The company has certainly done justice to the work; every actor in the young cast has a moment to excel. The talented Salt and Wiltshire feel like major discoveries, and Lindsay Leopold is stunning as pivotal tossed-out teen Ilse. If you want to catch the next generation of Chicago musical-theater talent, this is a good start to your awakening. —*Kris Vire*

St. Nicholas



Seanachai Theatre Company/Shanghai Low Theatricals (see Resident companies). By Conor McPherson. Dir. Matthew Miller. With Steve Pickering. 1hr 50mins; one intermission.

Conor McPherson's cracking good yarn from 1997 concerns a drama critic who becomes a monster. Sorry, that's probably redundant. It's about a drama critic who becomes a particular kind of monster—a panderer for a coven of vampires living in the London suburbs. His job is to find fresh victims for the bloodsuckers (they prefer the young).

Before he gets to the vampires, our antihero describes his previous job at a Dublin newspaper, where he used his poison pen to strike terror and loathing in the hearts of the city's theatrical community. As played by Steve

Pickering, he's the sort of prick who clearly savors a contempt for humanity so vast as to include even himself. With his crisp consonants and bulldog-like build, Pickering conveys both smugness and thuggishness.

He also deftly navigates the monologue's teasing twists and turns as well as its mix of storytelling genres (including gothic horror, folk tale and male-menopause bildungsroman). Pickering's American accent can be distracting since the play is set in contemporary Dublin and London and we don't say "bollocks" over here. The only other misstep in Matthew Miller's stripped-bare staging comes toward the end, when Pickering starts reading his lines from a notebook rather than reciting them from memory, as if to underline what McPherson has made clear: that the critic, after feeding on other people's work, has at last found his own story to tell. —*Zac Thompson*

steppenwolf

SWIMMING POOLS
SAUSAGES
& SPEEDOS...

OH MY!

AN ELOQUENT, WILDLY FUNNY RIFF ON LIFE, LOVE AND FATE.

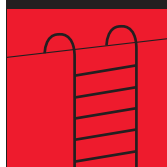
PENELOPE

BY POWERHOUSE IRISH PLAYWRIGHT
ENDA WALSH

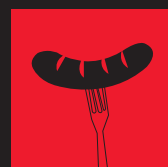
DIRECTED BY ENSEMBLE MEMBER AMY MORTON

FEATURING ENSEMBLE MEMBERS IAN BARFORD, TRACY LETTS &
YASEN PEYANKOV WITH SCOTT JAECK & LOGAN VAUGHN

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