

# The Blonde, the Brunette and the Vengeful Redhead



**Writers' Theatre** (see Resident companies). By Robert Hewett. Dir. Joe Hanreddy. With Deborah Staples. 2hrs 15mins; one intermission.

After her husband of 17 years leaves her for another woman, shy redheaded housewife Rhonda commits a crime of passion that alters the course of several lives. With a single actress portraying seven characters of different genders, ages and hair color, Australian playwright Robert Hewett's 2004 work shows off its central performer's transformative abilities, and emphasizes the connective thread that arises from Rhonda's act of violence. Deborah Staples and director Joe Hanreddy staged the play at Milwaukee Repertory Theater in 2008; their experience with the script is apparent in Writers' sharp, affecting production.

Staples's hair, makeup and costume changes all occur onstage, creating an intimacy between audience and actress as we watch her change into a four-year-old boy or an elderly woman. When Staples begins Act II as Rhonda's husband, Graham, the lack of that visible character shift, combined with his caricatured personality, makes him the least captivating of the characters. A wholly repulsive and apathetic figure, Graham fits the villain role too perfectly; it's hard to see how three women could fall for him.

The most poignant monologues come not from the titular characters, but from the people who've become involuntarily swept up in the domestic drama. Through the accounts of a lesbian doctor, her son and their next-door neighbor, Hewett explores the devastating effects one person's actions have on an entire community. Staples's fully realized characters compensate for the script's contrivances. She creates a cast of individuals who would be easily distinguishable even without the wigs.—*Oliver Sava*



**BLONDE AMBITION**  
Staples tries on a role.

**LEARNING THE ROPES**  
Sher sails away.



## Crow



**Walkabout Theater Company** (see Fringe & storefront). By Jeremy Sher. Dir. Scott Bradley. With Sher. 1hr 20mins; no intermission.

Russia won the space race, and America might be first to the moon, but Britain can reclaim the sea, says Donald Crowhurst (Jeremy Sher), working on a potential investor in his bid to circumnavigate the globe. Never mind that the real-life Crowhurst, a 37-year-old electrical engineer, was barely an amateur sailor himself; he believed in tomorrow, which Sher's new solo piece makes out like something worth celebrating, even if belief wasn't enough to see Crowhurst through.

While the U.S. and Russia had their eyes on the skies, Britain was in the grip of sailing fever in 1968 following Sir Francis Chichester's solo trip the year before. *The Sunday Times* sponsored a race to repeat the feat,

which is how Crowhurst found himself at sea, literally and figuratively.

Sher's script approximates some of the rambling prose discovered in Crowhurst's logbook when his ship was encountered ghosting across the ocean nine months after he set sail. In a sometimes trancelike state, he tenderly addresses his wife, Clare, or waxes on about his hero, Albert Einstein. (Later, when he begins talking to an overhead seagull, he names it Albert.) All the while, he rigs and realigns the ropes that eventually crisscross the stage, becoming the show's central visual metaphor—the lines that connect us to our past and future, and to our lives with others even when we're alone. Sher's facility with those ropes, and sometimes on them (Lucky Plush's Meghann Wilkinson and 500 Clown's Adrian Danzig provide movement direction), is mesmerizing, though even at 80 minutes, his show feels a tad too long.—*Kris Vire*

## State Street



**City Lit Theater** (see Resident companies). Music and lyrics by Philip LaZebnik. Book by Kingsley Day and LaZebnik. Dir. Sheldon Patinkin. With ensemble cast. 2hrs 20 mins; one intermission.

This old-fashioned musical comedy features a who's who of 19th-century Chicago, spanning the socioeconomic spectrum from Marshall Field to Mrs. O'Leary's cow. Authors Philip LaZebnik and Kingsley Day seem to have a special fondness for the city's colorful rogues, hustlers and scam artists. Much of the plot is taken up with the efforts of out-of-towner Uranus H. Crosby, who built Chicago's first opera house, to bilk his investors.

His opposite number is the only main character who's entirely made up:

Jennie Comstock (Diane Mair), a Marian the Librarian type with high ideals and a stockpile of Greco-Roman factoids she spouts at every opportunity. Jennie's attempts to make her way in the big, bad city are the central focus of this new work, with borrowings from *Guys and Dolls* for atmosphere and *The Music Man* for plot points. LaZebnik's score is similarly derivative, a forgettable blend of music hall and Gilbert and Sullivan.

The cast of Sheldon Patinkin's chintzy production struggles to find a tone, wobbling between knockabout farce and a kind of winking wholesomeness. It's not helped much by a script filled with one-dimensional characters who repeat the same jokes over and over. Only Matthew Keffer, who brings some flash and a shit-eating grin to the role of Crosby, manages to rise above the material. Everybody else runs out of steam well before the curtain call.—*Zac Thompson*

# I Am Going to Change the World



**Chicago Dramatists** (see Resident companies). By Andrew Hinderaker. Dir. Jonathan Berry. With Nicholas Harazin. 2hrs 10mins; one intermission.

The young man in the prologue to Andrew Hinderaker's new play fully believes the sentiment in its title. Standing before us in a cap and gown, addressing his University of Chicago class as its valedictorian, John Chapman (Nicholas Harazin) explains the plan he laid out for himself at age nine, on a sheet of paper he still carries in his wallet. It involved graduating high school and college at the top of his class, getting a job at Goldman Sachs and culminated at age 35: "Take over Goldman Sachs, buy the Sears Tower, and build a home on the top floor." His interview at Goldman Sachs is the day after graduation.

The way Hinderaker lays out what happens next is such a slow, skillful reveal, I hate to give it away. John wakes up the next day, dashing out the door for his interview, only to discover to his great confusion it isn't the next day at all—it's his 35th birthday, and the rest of his list hasn't been checked off as planned. As explained by the therapist he doesn't recognize (played by a warm and moving Judy Blue), he's had what's called an anniversary reaction, blocking out the last 14 years.

In *World*, as in his *Suicide, Incorporated*, Hinderaker takes a seemingly far-fetched premise and finds in it deep veins of compassion and humanity. Director Jonathan Berry and a terrific cast explore the large and small consequences of great expectations. As John, the appealing Harazin smartly balances his character's unlikable tendencies with his disorientation and hurt while he learns he might have to start with changing himself.—*Kris Vire*



**PLOT OF GOLDMAN**  
Harazin is a man with a plan.

PHOTOS: TOP, EMMA STANTON; LEFT, MICHAEL BROSLOW; RIGHT, JEFF PINES