

## Night Just Before the Forest

★★★★★

**Lake Como in Rome** (see Fringe & storefront). By Bernard-Marie Koltès. Translated by Timothy Johns. Dir. Elisabeth Barnick. With Kevin V. Smith. 1hr 25mins; no intermission.

"I am not one of them." The unnamed narrator of Bernard-Marie Koltès's experimental 1977 solo piece repeats this phrase throughout *Night Just Before the Forest*, a play that's certainly unlike most theater fare. Using fragmented language to recount his past family drama and sexual tragedy, this damaged outsider (Kevin V. Smith) tries to make his way through a strange urban environment.

Koltès, who died of AIDS in 1989, had a bleak worldview and an abstract, stream-of-consciousness writing style. Here he presents pieces of thoughts with little punctuation and no stage directions. Elisabeth Barnick's direction adds to the script's chaos. The production begins with Smith lying on the floor in silence for over a minute and ends with him singing mariachi staple "Cielito Lindo" in the dark; it all feels like being different just to be different.

Barnick's staging adds movement to bring visual variation to the monologue, but Smith is stuck on an elevated platform that limits his range of motion. It might be the director's intention to emphasize the character's immobility in life, but the actor's energy is trapped upstage, preventing him from establishing rapport with the audience. While Smith's monotone delivery lends his character a chilly intensity, he's unable to form connective tissue among the play's scattered ideas.—*Oliver Sava*

## SHOW OF THE WEEK



**FLY BOYS** David Steiger, Casey Chapman and Bob Wilson, from left, come undone.

## ANGER/FLY

★★★★★

**Trap Door Theatre** (see Fringe & storefront). By Ruth Margraff. Dir. Kate Hendrickson. With ensemble cast. 1hr 10mins; no intermission.

Nobody has sardonic smiles down pat quite like the raucous, challenging, giddy ensemble over at Trap Door Theatre. The European-styled company has a knack for utilizing Trojan horse sweetness to turn dense manifestos melliferous. So, when Ruth Margraff opens her new play, inspired by Ionesco's *La Colère*, with an upbeat a cappella tune and a town full of fresh-faced churchgoers sporting ear-to-ear grins, you can bet your Sunday bonnet there'll be some hell to pay by the end.

In Margraff's case, it's the extermination of humanity, and it all starts with a bug in a bowl of soup. Tramp, social commentator and literal fly-on-the-wall Antonio Brunetti dissects marriages, class hierarchies and social contracts from the fringe of his blissfully ignorant, well-to-do fellow townsfolk as they scapegoat and conform themselves to their own demise. Mimicking absurdist playwright Ionesco's deliberate, playful sense of alienation, director Kate Hendrickson stylizes Margraff's adaptation with video installations, bubble blowers, heightened expressionist gestures, pop music and a candy-colored kaleidoscope orgy, the result being as comprehensible as that all sounds. Hendrickson's excellent cast manages the dark comedy and helps clarify the sometimes overwrought ideas, making the frequently overstuffed head-scratchers entertaining, if not always convincing.—*Dan Jakes*

## In the Continuum

★★★★★

**Pegasus Players** (see Resident companies). By Danai Gurira and Nikkole Salter. Dir. Ilesa Duncan. With Sam Bailey, Ashleigh LaThrop. 1hr 30mins; no intermission.

In this 2005 piece, originally performed by authors Danai Gurira and Nikkole Salter, two black women in very different social situations find themselves on parallel tracks. Abigail (Sam Bailey) is a married, upwardly mobile mom in Zimbabwe; Nia (Ashleigh LaThrop) is a 19-year-old American "hood rat" living in a halfway house and counting on the hot-shit basketball recruit she's dating to give her a new life. The two women find their personal narratives interrupted when they learn they're both pregnant and HIV-positive.

**CONTINUUM EDUCATION** Bailey, left, and LaThrop drop knowledge.



In Gurira and Salter's thoughtful, unsentimental plotting, both performers play multiple figures in their base characters' lives as we see how, despite their very different starting points, their options are similarly throttled by their diagnoses. Unlike many monologue-based pieces, *In the Continuum* smartly puts the performers always in conversation with another, unseen character rather than having them

address us directly. Director Ilesa Duncan manages the two-way traffic well as Bailey and LaThrop flip from role to role with a simple retying of costume designer Christine Pascual's brightly colored scarves. LaThrop shows particularly impressive range in embodying Nia's worn-down mother, a cousin who recommends cashing in and the basketball star's pragmatic parent.—*Kris Vire*