

## Toast of the Town



**LABOR OF LOVE**  
Factory's cast holds a birthday party.



**Factory Theater** (see Fringe & storefront). By Scott Oken and Ernie Deak. Dir. Nick Digilio. With ensemble cast. 1hr 20mins; no intermission.

Scott Oken and Ernie Deak's high-energy farce, first produced by the Factory Theater in 2005, works its comic chops on a number of levels. Most straightforwardly, it's an affectionately juvenile spoof of Chicago's theater scene, with playwright Goldie McJohn (Timothy C. Amos) struggling to break through from modest successes at small theaters and into more prestigious institutions like the Lawdy Mama Theatre Company (chief selling point: "It's by the lake!"). With his wife soon to give birth to their first child, Goldie's about to give up showbiz when Lawdy Mama's high and mighty (or just plain high) bigwigs Chief Floyd Rose (Dennis Schnell) and Commissioner Thurston deBladderhorn (Anthony

Tournis) decide to give him a slot in their season. High jinks involving nutty actors, eccentric directors, douche bag day-job managers and tall-pouring theater bars ensue, with some solid tweaks of establishment attitudes ("Theater has no place for new talent!") and of the city's critical phalanx.

But *Toast of the Town* is equally an homage to old-school comedy, with tips of the hat to fast-talking funnymen from the Marx Brothers to Benny Hill. Exaggerated double takes and wacky props abound; apropos of nothing, Deak strolls through a few times playing Bob Hope playing himself. (Yes, Hope was already dead at the time of the show's first run.) Deak, Oken and director Nick Digilio pack the runway so tight that not everything can land, and not all of the 18 cast members can keep up the pace without stumbling. But a few—Laura McKenzie's deranged director, Tony Kaehny's impossibly gay rival playwright and Chas Vrba as his jumpsuited henchman—more than deserve a toast.—*Kris Vire*

## The Odd Couple



**CLASH IN THE PAN** Grapey, left, and Kazurinsky differ on dishes.



**Northlight Theatre** (see Resident companies). By Neil Simon. Dir. BJ Jones. With Tim Kazurinsky, Marc Grapey. 2hrs 10mins; one intermission.

Less than two weeks before opening night, Northlight Theatre faced a last-minute Neil Simon-esque twist of its own: Originally set to reprise his role as Oscar opposite Tim Kazurinsky's Felix, prominently billed television actor George Wendt had to bow out of the production for medical reasons. (The two first coupled up last year in a Kansas City revival.) Reliable straight man Marc Grapey, whose recent credits include Goodman Theatre's *Race* and Victory Gardens' *Equivocation*, fills Wendt's shoes with a furrowed brow and a modern sense of *c'est la vie* cynicism in artistic director BJ Jones's production.

Simon's perennial 1965 situational comedy, a lovably light string of well-

crafted one-liners about two opposites navigating unexpected bachelorhood, shows its age for better and worse (and not just for its charming assumption that a sports writer could afford an eight-room apartment in New York City). Felix and Oscar reside in a universe of offstage pan crashes, onstage site gags and limited character intentions. Grapey and Kazurinsky find a nice balance, neither thumbing their noses at the broad comedy nor limiting the subtext to it. Kazurinsky's Felix is more stubborn than rude, deeply insecure and lost without the comfort of a woman who accepts his idiosyncrasies. Given a severely abbreviated rehearsal schedule, Grapey creates enough of a sense of back-story friendship to clarify why his compassion cuts through the frustration. The real scene-stealers, though, are giggly love interests Katherine Keberlein and Molly Glynn, more-than-welcome visitors at the poker table.—*Dan Jakes*

PHOTOS: LEFT, COURTESY OF FACTORY THEATER; RIGHT, MICHAEL BROSLOW

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