

Hellcab



Profiles Theatre (see Resident companies). By Will Kern. Dir. Darrell W. Cox. With ensemble cast. 1hr 10mins; no intermission.

The original production of Will Kern's *Hellcab* was a gritty, naturalistic representation of '90s Chicago that ran for nearly a decade after its 1992 debut. Now, 20 years later, the titular vehicle could well be a time-traveling DeLorean, taking audiences on a journey to the past that continues to entertain, even if it's not quite as timely. (The script's average cab fares: \$2-\$4.)

Taking place inside the taxi of a Russian immigrant driver (Konstantin Khrustov), Kern's drama is sharply staged by Darrell W. Cox, who deftly utilizes his massive cast of 34 (as opposed to a smaller cast doubling or tripling roles). The short vignettes range from snappy sketch-comedy gags to more intense fare, such as when our cabbie picks up a woman who's just been raped. The result is an expansive portrait of the city, depicting a South Side of dangerous depths and a North Side that's safer but equally eventful.

Among a uniformly strong cast of cab patrons are a handful of standouts:



BACKSEAT DRIVER
Passenger Jack McCabe harasses Khrustov.

Stephanie Monday's nymphomaniac lawyer, Katrina V. Miller's drunk welfare recipient, Maryann Carlson's accordion-playing milkmaid and Aaron Holland's exasperated drag queen. The focal point, Khrustov is at his best as a helpless bystander; when he explodes in rage, his characterization ventures into cartoonish territory, working against the hyper-realistic dialogue. Still, this *Hellcab* is a ride worth taking.—*Oliver Sava*

The Burnt Part Boys



Griffin Theatre Company (see Resident companies). Book by Mariana Elder. Music by Chris Miller. Lyrics by Nathan Tysen. Dir. Jonathan Berry. With ensemble cast. 1hr 35mins; no intermission.

Set in rural West Virginia in 1962, *The Burnt Part Boys* tells a refreshingly simple, bluegrass-tinged tale. A decade after four miners were killed in a disaster—including the father of 18-year-old Jake (Mike Tepeli) and younger brother Pete (Charlie Fox)—the company is set to reopen the mine. Jake, who dropped out of school to support Pete and their unseen, depressed mother, is on the fast track to foreman and has seemingly made his peace with working in the mine where his dad died. But Pete, too young to remember his father, sees the area that the locals call the Burnt Part as sacred space. Inspired by his silver-screen idols—Alamo folk heroes Sam Houston, Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie, who speak to him in fantasy sequences—Pete enlists his best friend Dusty (Max Zuppa) on a quest to blow up the mine.

The 2010 play's action covers just a single day, as Pete and Dusty forge their way toward the Burnt Part while Jake and his uncouth pal Chet (Morgan Maher) give chase. Director Jonathan



BURN THIS Zuppa, left, and Fox have a plan.

Berry keeps the journey visually interesting even as the actors retread the same ground, using wooden chairs and ropes to convey a craggy, ever-changing landscape. Composers Chris Miller and Nathan Tysen, set to make their Broadway debut in the spring with an adaptation of *Tuck Everlasting*, have penned a lovely, twangy score. Though Mariana Elder's book often seems to be stalling for time, the compelling, sweet-voiced Tepeli and Fox dig for deep veins of truth.—*Kris Vire*

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