

A Steady Rain



Chicago Dramatists (see Resident companies). By Keith Huff. Dir. Russ Tutterow. With Peter DeFaria, Randy Steinmeyer. 1hr 30mins; no intermission.

Since debuting here in 2007, Keith Huff's self-consciously butch police drama had a glamorous interim appearance on Broadway in a money-minting limited run starring action hotties Hugh Jackman and Daniel Craig; Huff has gone on to write and produce for *Mad Men*. New York critics largely dismissed Huff's script as a hokey procedural, focusing on the movie stars.

The play now returns as the inaugural project of the Chicago Commercial Collective, an initiative with the potentially admirable goal of keeping nonprofit theaters' hits running. The CCC essentially re-creates the original production, with the same creative team, cast and venue. I first saw this production in its 2008 transfer to the Royal George, but the remount suggests that size matters. I thought the play seemed too small in that 150-seat theater; it's hard to imagine how minuscule it might have read on a Broadway stage. Chicago Dramatists' close quarters do much to enhance the intensity of Peter DeFaria and Randy Steinmeyer's performances without visual tricks (though Mike Tutaj's sound design is as evocative as his vivid projections in other shows).

Still, the magnified repeat view also enhances the steroidal quality of Huff's script, a tale of two beat cops packed with lurid twists and overwritten clichés. It also makes clear the imbalance between the characters. We're meant to see the recountings of deflating bad cop Denny and conflicted beta male Joey as competing threads, but now there's little doubt that DeFaria's Joey is the trustworthy voice, while Steinmeyer's Denny is all muscle, no mass.—*Kris Vire*



COP TALK DeFaria, left, and Steinmeyer spin their tales.



SHOW OF THE WEEK

REY OF LIGHT Poss, right, faces down fate.

Oedipus el Rey

Powerful stories repeat themselves. That's the implicit and explicit suggestion of Luis Alfaro's Chicano recasting of Sophocles, which opens in a prison setting, where a young male inmate expresses a desire to tell his own story, a new story. As his fellow prisoners take on characters, the scene shifts to South Central L.A., where gang boss Laius is told by a seer that his unborn son will kill him. Laius's right-hand man Tiresias, charged with killing the newborn Oedipus, spares him. But our fated stories, Oedipus will learn, are hard to escape.

Alfaro's charged resetting of the Greek myth is remarkably successful, aided by a fluid ensemble and Chay Yew's agile direction. Young Oedipus (Adam Poss), we discover, fell quickly into petty crime; Tiresias (Eddie Torres), feeling responsibility for the boy, robs a few



Victory Gardens Theater (see Resident companies). By Luis Alfaro. Dir. Chay Yew. With Adam Poss, Charin Alvarez, Arturo Soria, Eddie Torres. 1hr 35mins; no intermission.

7-Elevens just so he can get tossed in prison to look after him. When the time comes for Oedipus's release, he ignores his surrogate father's warnings and returns to Los Angeles, where gang rivalries and territories make fitting stand-ins for ancient city-states. Sure enough, he soon offs Laius in a street fight and unknowingly takes his father's place in his mother Jocasta's bed.

The latter event unfolds in a long, aching sensual scene between Charin Alvarez, whose Jocasta is both

radiant and haunted, and Poss, in a magnetic, surely career-making turn as Oedipus. While the playwright suggests Oedipus's hubristic actions elsewhere can be chalked up to a combination of factors—arrogance, ambition, an indifferent prison system, God—here his intentions seem pure. The two actors, nude and tightly intertwined on a slowly revolving turntable, enact an entire tender romance that cooks up a complicated mix of emotions as we watch. Where the rest of the play unfolds with a driving rhythm of inevitability, Yew gives this searingly intimate moment plenty of room to breathe—making their climactic moment of horrified discovery all the more agonizing. Alfaro's impressive act of translation and Yew's thrilling, immersive staging prove that old stories are worth new tellings.—*Kris Vire*

Moment



Steep Theatre (see Resident companies). By Deirdre Kinahan. Dir. Jonathan Berry. With ensemble cast. 1hr 45mins; one intermission.

It doesn't take long to sense there's a dark open secret at the heart of Irish playwright Deirdre Kinahan's 2011 family drama. It's evident in the way adult daughter Niamh (Cynthia Marker) bristles when told by her pill-popping mother, Teresa (Maggie Cain), that her brother Nial (Josh Odor) is coming for a visit, and in the way Niamh's younger sister Ciara (Julia Siple) and her husband, Dave (James Allen), tense up at Niamh's presence. But the nature of the apparent bad blood between Niamh and Nial,

revealed in a striking emotional explosion at the end of Kinahan's first act, is wholly unexpected.

That instant derives its gut-punch power in equal measures from Kinahan's carefully constructed plotting, which masterfully metes out information about the Lynch family's past and its present state, and from Jonathan Berry's precision-calibrated staging. Like last year's *Festen*, also at Steep, Berry's *Moment* delivers searingly honest family relationships. The reveal, and its Act II aftermath, rely on our recognizing the long, deep-seated history shared by the siblings, as well as the abject discomfort of being an outsider, like Nial's new wife (Carey Lee Burton) or Niamh's eager suitor (Alex Gillmor), when such intimate bruises are exposed. Kinahan is examining when—and even if—a



MOMENT OF TRUTH Steep's cast gets real.

family can regain balance after a major trauma. Berry sets the tone and pacing for maximum impact, and his terrific ensemble follows his lead, making this a *Moment* to remember.—*Kris Vire*

PHOTOS: TOP, MICHAEL BROSLIN; LEFT, JEFF PINES; RIGHT, LEE MILLER