

## The March



**Steppenwolf Theatre Company** (see Resident companies). By E.L. Doctorow. Adapted and dir. Frank Galati. With ensemble cast. 3hrs; one intermission.

Frank Galati's new adaptation of E.L. Doctorow's sprawling novel about Sherman's march through Georgia and the Carolinas in the waning days of the Civil War is admirably efficient, managing to include most of the author's many central characters and story lines. The piece stays true to Doctorow's themes about the war's role in defining and redefining the American idea.

If anything, Galati's adaptation might be too loyal to Doctorow's work. A vast majority of the dialogue is taken directly from the pages of the 2005 novel, and scenes often play out as discretely as chapters in the book. Where you want more theatrical juxtaposition and imagination, there's something pageant-like about the procession of scenes with supertitles providing dates and settings. And though Steppenwolf provides a large cast of 26 gifted actors, we rarely see more than a few of them onstage at once. One of Doctorow's major characters, Army doctor Wrede



**BATTLE SCARS**  
Groener, center, observes the carnage.

Sartorius (Philip R. Smith), describes the march as a living, breathing organism, miles long and wide, with its soldiers and followers serving as cells. That sense of overwhelming amplitude is missing in this version, in which Galati too often relies on Doctorow's words to stand in for action.

Still, the adapter-director is quite successful at getting into the minds of Doctorow's foremost characters. Harry Groener's Sherman is convincingly brilliant, conflicted and mildly unstable, while Ian Barford tears up the stage as unbalanced Confederate opportunist Arly Wilcox. A luminous Shannon Matesky gets the show's breakout role, terrifically inhabiting "white Negro" Pearl Jameson's own tentative march toward freedom.—*Kris Vire*

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## We Are Proud to Present a Presentation...



**Victory Gardens Theater** (see Resident companies). By Jackie Sibbles Drury. Dir. Eric Ting. With ensemble cast. 1hr 30mins; no intermission.

This mostly compelling new piece of metatheater, born of Victory Gardens' Ignition festival, works a multilayered task. Six young actors—importantly, three black, three white—say they have for us a presentation on the systematic extermination of the Herero tribe of southwest Africa (what is now the republic of Namibia) by German colonizers in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. After a brief overview of the history—which finds a surprising amount of humor in its presentational style and our tutors' actorly energy—the stage's work lights come up and we flash back to the actors' initial gathering, as they hash out how to present their presentation.

As the group pores over letters home from German soldiers—the only primary source material available, since the Herero were almost entirely stamped out—the dynamic shifts again and again as they try to find a way into the mind-set of those who would condone and participate in



**SPIRIT FINGERS**  
The cast looks for peace in our time.

genocide. Race naturally becomes a factor in the nameless characters' interactions, which turn touchy in ways both expected and surprising as the group members battle over assumptions and who's more understanding of whom. Jackie Sibbles Drury lands a number of intriguing blows in a production handsomely staged by Long Wharf Theatre's Eric Ting with an able and appealing cast. Still, inside-baseball theater-game gags wear thin, and the play's breathless climax feels artificially attained.—*Kris Vire*

## The Improv Play



**InFusion Theatre Company** (see Fringe & storefront). By Randall Colburn. Dir. Mitch Golob. With ensemble cast. 2hrs 20mins; one intermission.

Just before taking the stage with his iO team, comedian Stan (Rob Grabowski) grumbles, "God, I fuckin' hate improv." For many of the characters in Randall Colburn's new mash-up of theater and improv, the comedy scene is a prison. They're forced to settle for cruise shows and Groupon jobs to live out their dreams, but when is it time to give up and grow up?

When one of their comrades gets cast on *Saturday Night Live*, the comedians begin to reexamine their life choices and dedication to their craft. In creating a work that breaks down the barrier between comedy and "straight" theater, Colburn has pinpointed a struggle that will connect with any young artist.

David Ferguson designs the Storefront Theater space like a comedy club, with small tables in the audience and an open stage that director Mitch Golob uses to replicate the seamless flow of an improv show. Many of the scenes work like short



**YES, AND?** Nick Mikula, left, plays with Crispin.

sketches—so it shouldn't be too hard to cut about 20 minutes from the play, which begins to drag in Act II.

Both improvised and scripted, Colburn's exhilarating play doesn't sacrifice emotion for energy. While the 14-person ensemble is all excellent, Kevin Crispin and Lea Pascal stand out as comics in opposite places in their careers. Both performers excel at conveying the negative impact comedy has had on their relationships, further preventing them from finding comfort in each other.—*Oliver Sava*

PHOTOS: TOP LEFT, MICHAEL BROSLIN; TOP RIGHT, UZ LAUREN; BOTTOM, JOHN W. SISON