

How Long Will I Cry? Voices of Youth Violence



Steppenwolf Theatre Company (see Resident companies). By Miles Harvey. Dir. Edward Torres. With ensemble cast. 1hr 40mins; one intermission.

Assembled from interviews with dozens of Chicago residents, from teenagers to caregivers to rooftop camper Pastor Corey Brooks, *How Long Will I Cry?* is among the latest attempts to untangle Chicago's epidemic of youth violence (see also Collaboration's current *Crime Scene: A Chicago Anthology*). But Steppenwolf's piece, part of a larger initiative dubbed Now Is the Time, is explicitly aimed at young audiences. Journalist and first-time dramatist Miles Harvey assembled the script from interviews conducted by his students at DePaul, with able assistance by verbatim-theater vet Kelli Simpkins and director Edward Torres. The result feels honest and affecting.

Harvey uses the 2009 shooting death of DePaul student Frankie Valencia as a touchstone, drawing from writings and videos the young man left behind as well as interviews with his mother (a devastating Tara Mallen) and a friend (Shannon Matesky) who survived the shooting. There's also a narrator (Mark Ulrich) who speaks in Harvey's voice—a



ACHING NAMES The cast views the long list of young Chicagoans killed in the past year.

framing choice that feels necessary to explicate the play's context but also somewhat distancing; despite the ensemble's terrific work, the piece can feel at times like an enhanced lecture.

Working on the same long, open traverse stage that's concurrently home to Steppenwolf's production of *The Birthday Party*, scenic designer William Boles outfits it with tall, narrow walls at each end that serve as screens for video projections, showing everything from old *Chicago Defender* headlines chronicling the rise of gang activity in the '70s to the cell-phone video of Derion Albert being beaten to death. The effect suggests Millennium Park's Crown Fountain, if it displayed a more painful view of the city's life. —*Kris Vire*

Matryoshka



The Plagiarists (see Fringe & storefront). By Gregory Peters. Dir. Jack Dugan Carpenter. With ensemble cast. 1hr 40mins; no intermission.

When abducted by a serial killer, *Matryoshka* suggests, it's best to stay chatty. Continuing this season's trend of women getting tied to chairs in storefront theaters (see Jackalope's *Long Way Go Down* and Tympanic's *Ruby Wilder*), Gregory Peters's limp new reimagining of *One Thousand and One Nights* has a woman escaping death by telling stories.

Sherry (Jessica Saxvik) isn't the wife of the king but the latest victim of the Marrying Man (Robert Montgomery), a mass murderer who's killed seven women. The original story of Scheherazade works because there's an air of fantasy that makes it possible to believe she could prevent her death with captivating narratives. Switching to a contemporary setting where the killer ties women up before cutting off their appendages makes the plot impossible to swallow, especially when Sherry's stories are as lousy as these. The tales



CHARACTERS WELCOME Saxvik, front, looks to her stories to save her.

range from slapstick comedies about scientists having their brains switched with those of mice to noir thrillers starring sister femmes fatales.

Peters's script, which falls somewhere between bad sketch comedy and a college playwriting assignment, is referred to in press materials as a "manic gumbo." Translation: It's a random collection of stories that have no connection and little entertainment value, all staged by Jack Dugan Carpenter in the same exaggerated style. Like the Russian nesting dolls that give the play its name, *Matryoshka* offers diminishing returns with each new story. —*Oliver Sava*

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