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A Grand Night for Singing



RODGERS THAT The cast creates some enchanted evening.

★★★★★

Mercury Theater (see Resident companies). Music by Richard Rodgers. Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II. Dir. Kevin Bellie. With Robert Hunt, Stephen Schellhardt, Marya Grandy, Leah Morrow, Heather Townsend. 1hr 50mins; one intermission.

The Mercury Theater, active in recent years as a rental house, shifts into self-produced musicals under the new management of L. Walter Stearns and Eugene Dizon, formerly of Porchlight Music Theatre. Their first

subscription season kicks off with this 1993 revue of the songs of Rodgers and Hammerstein—a promising debut.

The song selection, as conceived by original director Walter Bobbie, draws heavily on the composing team's romantic numbers—or numbers recast as romantic: "Maria," the only tune here from *The Sound of Music*, becomes a problem to be solved by a lovelorn man rather than a Mother Abbess. The five arresting actor-singers are adept at crafting characters and relationships within the span of a song. They're aided by Kevin Bellie's fluid staging and choreography and a crack six-piece onstage band.—*Kris Vire*

Leaves, Trees, Forest

★★★★★

MPAACT (see Fringe & storefront). By Paul Notice. Dir. Carla Stillwell. With Trigney Morgan, Marc A. Rogers, Shayla Jarvis, Terry Francois. 1hr 15mins; no intermission.

Charles Bowery (Trigney Morgan) is a bright, idealistic senior at Georgetown University with big plans to change the world after graduation. Trouble is, the world isn't convinced he's as special as he thinks he is. Charles can't find a job—at least not the type of job he wants—and he's already struggling to afford such essentials as housing and weed. He would like a paid position on the staff of Rep. Clayton (Marc A. Rogers), the oily congressman he interns for, but Clayton isn't inclined to help anyone but Clayton.

At first, Paul Notice's new play feels like not much more than the record of a quarter-life crisis, with all of the entitled whining that entails. But then the playwright shifts gears. Through his fellow intern and on-again, off-again girlfriend (Shayla Jarvis), Charles learns that the socially conservative Clayton has an



AMBITION CONTROL Morgan, right, gets dirt on Francois.

extramarital relationship with a man named Nathan (played as a light-in-the-loafers caricature by Terry Francois).

Granted, it's not the most original twist of all time. But as Charles ruthlessly uses the information about Clayton to his advantage, Notice shows how quickly and irrevocably ambition can muddy principle. In the end, both men are two sides of the same coin. In Carla Stillwell's brisk staging, UIC undergrad Morgan plays Charles with energy and confidence. More important, he brings a quality to the character that's not in great supply on the page: likability.—*Zac Thompson*

PHOTOS: TOP: MICHAEL BROSLIN; BOTTOM: SIEFSU AMHU