

# Don't miss MadLab's 'Flashbacks'

BY RICHARD ADES

There's a clear winner in this year's **Theatre Roulette**.

MadLab's annual festival of short plays is always divided into three shows that are presented on different nights. Each show generally combines one or two strong works with others that aren't so strong.

This year, though, you can assure yourself of seeing nothing but worthwhile theater if you go on the night when the "Flashbacks" collection of plays is performed.

Of course, "worthwhile" is in the eye of the beholder.

Longtime MadLab fans won't want to miss "Foreshadows," despite its uneven quality, because it ends with a piece about the kind of desperate, dangerous characters who have long inhabited the troupe's stage. And viewers in search of a good laugh will want to catch "Foolishness" because it includes the best comedy of the whole festival.

To help you decide when to go, here's a capsule description of the offerings:

## Foolishness

*Hush Little Baby:* Playwright Montserrat Mendez eventually delivers a black comedy about self-centered parents (Stephen Woosley and Melissa Bair) who decide they'd be better off without their 6-week-old son. But the heartless humor is a tough sell, and Mendez begins his sales pitch too late.

*Impulsive:* Nicole Greevy, Uma Incrocci and Erica Jensen wrote this slapstick comedy



**Delicious piece of lunacy:** Stephen Woosley, Vicki Andronis, Josh Kessler and Jim Azelvandre in *Family Portrait*

in which an impulsive act in a restaurant provokes a food fight. It's good for chuckles, but they're mixed with dread—because you know how much cleaning up the crew will have to do afterward.

*The Inciting Incident:* Mark Cornell's one-man comedy is barely two minutes old before you realize narrator Dale's suspicions about his neighbors stem solely from his own fevered imagination. Jon

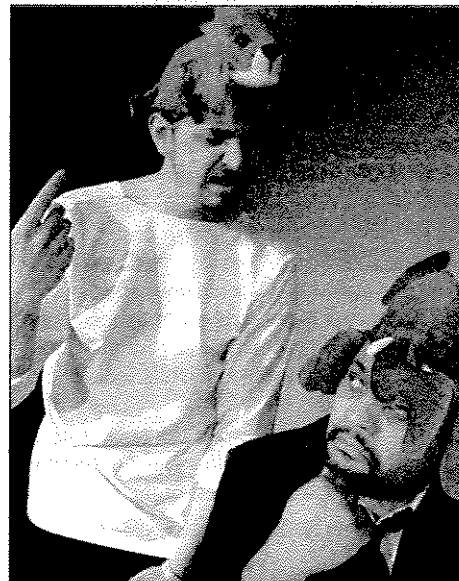
Osbeck's performance is impressively energetic, but unfortunately it's no more subtle than the script. The result is tedious overkill.

*Family Portrait:* Tom Hoefner's delicious piece of lunacy is brought to life by an inspired cast working under Michelle Batt's direction. Jim Azelvandre is hilarious as the rich but eccentric Mr. Rainsford; Vicki Andronis is droll as his wife. Adding to the

fun are Woosley as their befuddled son and Josh Kessler as a self-described Venezuelan who can't speak a word of Spanish.

## Foreshadows

*The Apple:* Jim Azelvandre's play is about a man and woman (Osbeck and Jennifer Feather) who meet on a park bench over and over—sometimes in the real world, sometimes



**Simplistic and shallow:** Josh Kessler and Kevin Scott in *Please Remove This Stuffed Animal from My Head*

in their respective imaginations. Sadly, the piece makes the mistake of starting with an attempted rape, then compounds the error by

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# THEATER

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trying to play the crime for laughs. That casts a pall on a creative and nicely performed work.

*Please Remove This Stuffed Animal from My Head:* Crystal Jackson's comedy is about a man (Kessler) who wants to have a stuffed lion removed from his noggin despite the endless roadblocks three bureaucrats place in his way. It's meant as a satire on abortion laws, but the play is so simplistic and shallow that even pro-choice advocates will be offended.

*Tangled:* MadLab returns to its violent roots in Terence Anthony's tale of a drug addict (Bair) who wants to end her miserable life with the help of her lascivious landlord (Kevin Scott). Meanwhile, the spirit of a mysterious man from her past (Andy Batt) eggs her on. Director Azelvandre and his cast handle the B-movie-style material with a deft touch.

## Flashbacks

*The Cat in Her Head:* Bonnie Lake's 50-minute drama is about a woman (Sarah Brunet) whose mother (Randi Morgan) is losing her memory. In the end, the play seems like less than the sum of its parts, but the parts—including touching metaphors and surprising character twists—are as strong as the performances director Chris Lane draws out of his cast.

*Child's Play:* A girl acts out her real-life problems with the help of her dolls in Ry Herman and Kolby Granville's short one-act. Traci Weaver puts her distinctive voice to good use as the girl, while Andronis and Woosley interact entertainingly as the dolls.

*Saver:* Mark Harvey Levine's one-act is

about an aging man (Osbeck) who keeps a stash of seemingly unimportant souvenirs from his past. Music plays an indispensable role in the tender mood piece, sensitively directed by Brian Cheslik.



**Caffeinated direction:** Vicki Andronis and Sarah Brunet in *On the Porch One Crisp Spring Morning*

*On the Porch One Crisp Spring Morning:* Author Alex Dremann obviously had TV's *Alias* in mind when he wrote this clever spy spoof. Andronis and Brunet have a ball as a mother and daughter who meet for coffee and end up spilling one revelation after another. Peter Graybeal supplies the caffeinated direction.

## INFORMATION

*Theatre Roullette* will continue through May 26 at MadLab, 105 N. Grant Ave. "Foolishness" will be presented at 8 p.m. today, May 18 and 26; "Foreshadows" at 8 p.m. Friday, May 19 and 24, 2 p.m. May 26; "Flashbacks" at 8 p.m. Saturday, May 17 and 25, 4 p.m. May 26. Running time: about 1 hour, 50 minutes (including intermission). Tickets are \$10-\$15 (sliding scale), \$8 for students and seniors, \$6 for MadLab members. 221-5418.