

What a Rush!

Mews great venue for Limbaugh parody

Theatre review by John Busbee

The Vaudeville Mews continues to build its niche as home to eclectic, cutting edge theatre. Charlie Varon's "Rush Limbaugh in Night School" delivers a major dose of satire, laughs and liberal lampooning of the conservative talk show icon. Prepare for a funny-bone workout with this adaptation of Varon's comedy.

Director Ann Wilkinson takes "Rush," written as a one-man show, and allows title role actor, Thatcher Williams, to focus on his character by adding six other actors. The result is Limbaugh parody meets "The Rocky & Bullwinkle Show" - a quick-paced, witty delivery of action and satire, liberally layered with schtick, bits, asides and one-liners. Wilkinson deftly blends a wide range of talents into a fairly tight ensemble that delivers an overall enticing satire.

Williams' research of Limbaugh pays big dividends. The catch phrases and mannerisms are there, wrapped in the bigger-than-life attitude that is vintage Rush and as big as his stogie. A nice

touch is his progressive disrobing which reflects the character's inevitable collision with his conservatism's antagonists. Whew! Limbaughism must be contagious. Michael Cornelison's Narrator adds wonderful texture and layering to the show. Drawing inspiration from Jay Ward's iconic narration in "Rocky & Bullwinkle," Cornelison slides in and out of scenes, breaking theatrical barriers with ease. His audience rapport is masterfully satisfying.

Other highlights include Karen Burkett-Sandoval (Nina Eggly), Timothy Larson (J. Neil Rodriguez) and Barbara Martin (Elea Avon). Burkett-Sandoval brings an engaging forever-connected-with-her-past daze and charm to her character. Her scenes with Williams are great fun. Larson delivers memorable characters that can best be described as "vewy, vewy good" - see the show, and enjoy. Martin's crisp characterizations are scintillatingly created. Her recurring role as Central Park's Shakespearean director, Spalding Gray, is gut-busting

funny. The inevitable collision of characters, ideologies and revelations in the final scene are Keystone-coppish in pacing and absolutely hilarious. Kyle 'Eric' Chizek and Kate Van Haafte round out the cast, bringing fresh talent into the ever-growing cycle of mentoring opportunities in the Mews' programming.

Two ensemble highlights are the Act I-closing IPTV parody, and the entr'acte parody of "You Are So Beautiful" and sung by Rush as "I Am So Beautiful." The multi-tasking talents of Stage Manager, Jaysene Overton, deserve special recognition for her work while hosting, running sound and lights, and coordinating and running the three-video set enhancement.

The Vaudeville Mews successfully continues its mission of producing unique theatre in central Iowa. "Rush" will produce much residual praise for the Mews. Be sure to attend so you can claim your connection to this blend of satire, absurdity and great entertainment.