

## THEATER REVIEW

# Life, love and nuclear attack entertain in one-act comedies

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REGISTER STAFF WRITER

Let's call it "A Cupful of Comedy."

There's too much silly fun to stick with **"Pocketful of Pestilence"** - three one-act comedies featuring mayflies, frogs and cockroaches now at the Vaudeville Mews.

Director Ann Wilkinson has flipped the seating area and stage at the Vaudeville Mews (on Fourth Street in Des Moines), putting the stage in the round and opening new possibilities with the stairs and an alley exit.

David Ives' **"Time Flies,"** the opener, is a funny take on love and death on a tight schedule. Jerry Hatchitt and Amy Stanwood play Horace and May, two mayflies on their first and last date due to their one-day life span.

Hatchitt is excellent as a nervous, fumbling Horace while Stanwood turns May into a frisky, forward Modern Chick who's ready for love. Now if they can just defy nature - and a boisterous, creepy David Attenborough (Kyle Chizek, delightfully at full throttle) on the television.

**"Joe & Stew's Theater of Brotherly Love & Financial Success,"** a half-comedy, half-rant by Jacqueline Reingold, offered the best performances but the

weakest material. I'm not saying this because the three characters - the only survivors of a nuclear attack - are two cockroaches (veteran John Busbee and promising newcomer Spencer Gilbert) and a theater critic.

Busbee is a hoot as Joe, a dim but lovable sort who's the kind of cockroach who remembers all of his vacations by the food. Gilbert conveys Reingold's love of the theater, but the play doesn't really have much else to say other than theater critics are morons. Duh.

The most ambitious and adventurous comedy of the evening is easily local playwright Thatcher Williams' free-spirited adaptation of **"The Frogs."** Williams has trimmed down and camped up Aristophanes' classic comedy.

Oh, Dionysus (Busbee) and his servant, Xanthias (Gilbert), are still on their way to hire a good poet but now Dionysus is golfing 72 holes along the way with Xanthias as his caddy. Chizek is a triple threat, first as a John Belushi-styled Heracles, then as a super-fey Aeacus and lastly, Pluto.

Williams pumps up his adaptation with a bushel of gags, ranging from the Muppets to a Chris De Burgh song to Interstate Highway

235 construction. The middle third, like Dionysus and Xanthias, wanders a bit and could be trimmed further. And Chizek's Carmen Miranda bit is funny, but the accent is too thick and makes Aristophanes less accessible. That's something to avoid when the average person doesn't know the ancient Greek playwright Aristophanes from Aerosmith.

The final third, however, is a treat as we get ringside seats to a hilarious poetry smackdown between a slacker surfer dude Euripides (Hatchitt) and cocky Aeschylus (John Cisar). If the original text had been this much fun, I might have stayed awake in high school.

## Details

**WHAT:** "Pocketful of Pestilence"

**WHERE:** Vaudeville Mews

**WHEN:** Tonight, running through March 20.

**CURTAIN:** 7 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays; 3 p.m. Sundays;

**CAST:** John Busbee, Kyle Chizek, John Cisar, Spencer Gilbert, Jerry Hatchitt, and Amy Stanwood.

**DIRECTOR:** Ann Wilkinson

**TICKETS:** \$12 in advance through [iowatix.com](http://iowatix.com) or \$15 at the door

**LENGTH:** 1 hour, 35 minutes

**AUDIENCE:** PG-13 for sexually suggestive scenes.