

Reviewing Renegade

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Food-themed shows rise to the top

Last weekend's *Renegade Theatre Festival* transformed Old Town into one big stage, as actors and actresses took over nine of the area's businesses and empty spaces. With show names like "Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner," "Comfort Food" and "Surviving Lunch," we couldn't help but notice a culinary theme. Overall, our judges thought this year's batch of shows to be quite tasteful, but they did find a couple of them to be only half-baked. For more reviews, visit www.lansingcitypulse.com.

Two-course meal

Rob Roznowski's "Comfort Food" and Brad Rutledge's "Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner" are two wildly divergent recipes for tasty theater performances. Rutledge's piece, composed of three vignettes, were delicious morsels of spicy snack food, while Roznowski's well-researched history of American cookbooks was a gourmet extravaganza of changing social attitudes mixed with a powerful feminist political agenda. Rutledge used the three-meal focus for observing the differences between love at the end of life, love in the middle of life and love happening (or not) on the very first date. The tender moments

trigger thoughts of whether one loves most intensely at first sight or at the moments closer to death. The focus of "Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner" is on the intimacy of the relationships — or lack of it — rather than the food itself. "Comfort Food," on the other hand, explores the nuances of relationships through attitudes towards cooking and cookbooks over the ages and was a more fully fleshed out production. *Tom Helma*

"Working in Restaurants"

Incest, rape, pedophilia and murder were on the menu for "Working in Restaurants," a new performance dripping with juicy, gory banter. Although its production was a little rough around the edges, this roller coaster-meets-train wreck of a story exploring angst and loneliness kept you craving more. It bravely tackled taboo subjects, lacing in dark humor to balance the drama, making things fresh and amusing despite its depressing disposition. *Tracy Key*

"Based on a Totally True Story"

Solid directing and stellar performances far outweigh Robert Aguirre-Sacasa's self-indulgent script. This is the tale of a young Manhattan playwright and the unlikely adaptation his play makes from stage to screen. It certainly offers some clever commentary on the inner workings of Hollywood, writers and contemporary gay culture in the ultimate urban setting. Director Dennis Corsi and the cast provide earnestness and honesty to their roles, particularly in standout performances from Michael Hays, Angela Dill and Ricky Hernandez. Ultimately, Aguirre-Sacasa just assumes that the audience cares how his characters fare in his drawn out, conventional conclusion. Corsi and his cast actually ensure that you do. *Paul Wozniak*

"Think Tank"

Even the experts don't have all the answers. "Think Tank" tackles life's mysteries, pushes its audience to examine the uncomfortable unknown. University of Michigan student and playwright Ben Blackman sets the scene with a group of professors waiting for a focus group to begin. A small conversation develops into musings, such as the meaning of life and debating death's origins. Michael Banghart turns in an understated performance as Ted, an everyman whose core sense of self and framework for humanity unfolds beyond his comprehension and control. Andrew Bailiff (who also directs) plays a pragmatic thinker, showcasing his comedic timing as well as his ability to delve into the brevity of our time on this planet. There is an existential element to "Think Tank," and Blackman is clearly processing life's worth on stage. While the script builds initially, the end needs a little bit more polish to leave the audience still pondering their legacy rather than the last line of dialogue. *Erin Buitendorp*

"Long Gone: A Poetry Sideshow"

Karrie Waarala's intriguing performance in "Long Gone: A Poetry Sideshow" as Tess, a sharp-tongued, tattooed carnal freak, was so genuine and emotional that it was easy to get swept away. Her witty sarcasm and poetic storytelling made the show a joy to watch, and when bolstered by a multimedia arrangement of photographs, video and voiceovers that brought Tess' seedy memories

to life, a real theatrical masterpiece was created. *Tracy Key*

“My Life”

Although he self-identifies as “disabled,” “My Life” writer/performer Timothy Lewis’ style and delivery are fully capable. Lewis was born with malformed, yet functional, arms and hands, and in this autobiographic monologue, he describes the struggles and self-defeating demons he experienced before embracing his passion to become an actor. The show’s strongest moment came at the end when Lewis returned to his script to share the pain of growing up without parents. Peppered with folksy asides and amusing anecdotes, “My Life” shows real potential for either public radio storytelling or the motivational speaker circuit. With more editing, polish and a clearer direction, this could be a confessional powerhouse. *Paul Wozniak*

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