

COTTAGE THEATRE'S FLYING CIRCUS

Tony Rust taps into Monty Python's absurdist, ramshackle spirit with *Spamalot*

The Knights Who Say "Ni." The Killer Rabbit of Caerbannog and the Gorge of Eternal Peril. A three-headed giant, a sorcerer named Tim and that petulant French sentry who threatens to "fart in your general direction" before vowing to "taunt you a second time."

These, then, are but a few of the impertinent perils awaiting King Arthur and his knights as they seek their glory in Cottage Theatre's production of *Spamalot*, a "new musical (lovingly) ripped off from the motion picture *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*." Directed by Tony Rust from a book by Python alum Eric Idle, this irreverent musical is actually something of an anti-musical that parodies the dog-eared traditions of Broadway while also offering a tongue-in-cheek tour of the comedy troupe's more memorable skits.

For smirking generations of undersexed, overstimulated geeks, Monty Python — in such iconic movies as *The Life of Brian* (1979) and especially *The Holy Grail* (1975), with its absurdist undermining of heroic manhood — has offered a dialect of communion in a cold, humorless modern world. John Cleese, Terry Gilliam and the rest of



DAVID N. SMITH, MARC SIEGEL AND TRACY NYGARD IN *SPAMALOT*

the original Python crew combined high-minded irony with the juvenile punch of bawdy toilet humor to create a kind of hybridized cavalcade of comic skits that were at once uproariously stupid and wildly sophisticated. They were postmodern without trying to be postmodern, and funny as the foot of God.

Director Rust and his ensemble cast tap nicely into our geek nostalgia for all things Pythonesque, creating a ramshackle show that lampoons with mock-earnest grandeur the whole tradition of big Broadway productions. The sets — cardboard castles on wheels, boulders that get carted off stage, a tremendous Trojan Rabbit — are appropriately garish and two-dimensional, as befits the ragtag aesthetic of the Flying Circus boys. Even a few opening night kinks and missed marks were turned to advantage thanks to the patched-together nature of the musical. With Monty Python, the sense that everything could fall apart at any moment is just another element of comic risk.

Spamalot really takes off during the second act, as Idle's spoof of musical theater bashes away at the fourth wall and the audience is let in on the wry winks. Here the cast goes all in, and a number of the performances are spot-on, evoking the fetishistic splendor of Python's idiosyncratic humor. As King Arthur, Davis N. Smith ably helms the show, channeling Graham Chapman's blend of bemused and bombastic delivery. Tracy Nygard soars as Lady of the Lake (her rendition of "The Diva's Lament" is stunning). Marc Siegel is wonderfully sly as Arthur's servant Patsy, and George Comstock excels in multiple roles that include Lancelot, the Head Knight of Ni and the French Taunter. Kory Weimer (Sir Robin), Eric Elligott (Dennis, Sir Galahad, Black Knight), Earl Ruttencutter (Sir Bedevere) and Richard Reaksecker (Kevin) also fill multiple roles, and each grabs his moment in the spotlight. ■

Monty Python's *Spamalot* runs through Oct. 27 at the Cottage Theatre; \$19-\$23.



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