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## THEATER



KIM FAIRBAIRN, MELISSA MILLER AND MEGAN ROBERTSON IN ACE'S *DISENCHANTED*

## PRINCESS ACT

*Bawdy, naughty women set Disney straight in ACE's Disenchanted*

**N**o holds barred: There is nothing the ladies in *Disenchanted* aren't willing to throw down in an effort to overturn society's ideal of a Disney princess. From tirades about historical inaccuracies to really dirty Pinocchio jokes, all's fair in Actors Cabaret of Eugene's (ACE) production of Dennis T. Giacino's irreverent musical.

There is plenty to poke fun at in the Disney portrayal of women from Germanic and French folktales, Chinese legends and American history. While *Disenchanted* goes too far at times (OK, all the time), it does explore some interesting issues, such as: Why are we marrying guys we just met the page before? Why are woodland creatures chattering to us all the time? And who cleans this castle, anyway?

At the heart of the issue is the manner in which Disney hammers home the so-called Princess Complex, "in which you are only desirable and valid if you are a beauty-obsessed, ditzy, insecure, Bambi-like waif," and you somehow need a man to save you.

*Disenchanted* is a great choice for ACE, with a small cast, wild costumes and raucous audience participation. Six women with big voices get to participate in lusty vocal numbers and a wild rumpus on the stage. Chelyce Chambers, Kim Fairbairn, Melissa Miller, Jenny Parks, India Potter and Megan Robertson — all under the direction of Joe Zingo — make for a great team, and one enthusiastically hailed by the audience.

*Disenchanted* is not a spit-polish, picture-perfect play. It's more Amy Schumer than Meryl Streep, and that's fitting for the theme. Like any variety show, some songs are better than others and the banter between the characters can be a little forced.

But despite the silly, over-the-top gags and gutter-dragging lyrics, there are moments of beautiful insight. Pocahontas sings "Honestly," in which she decries the inaccurate telling of her story as well as the crazy sexuality Disney thrust upon a character who, by most accounts, would have been 10 years old when the story takes place. "All I Want to Do is Eat" is a laugh-until-you-start-sobbing song about the insane impossibility of remaining young and thin.

Short and anything but sweet, ACE's *Disenchanted* is just what a rainy January evening calls for. It's not a family show, so bring your friends, not your children. As one audience member put it afterward: "I had a great girls' night out with my friends." If you don't have plans for Valentine's weekend, this would be the most appropriate reservation to make. — Anna Grace

*Disenchanted* plays through Feb. 20 at Actors Cabaret of Eugene; [actorscabaret.org](http://actorscabaret.org) or 683-4368.

## THE WAR AT HOME

*An Iraqi vet returns home in University Theatre's Water by the Spoonful*

**T**here's something slightly off about University Theatre's current production of *Water by the Spoonful*, the Pulitzer-winning second installment in Quiara Alegria Hudes' trilogy of plays about a returning Iraqi War vet who struggles to reintegrate himself into civilian life in the U.S.

There's a sense that the play itself, with its intersecting storylines and themes of addiction and alienation, proves too weighty, too loaded with significance for the crew at UT to handle: The production, directed by Theresa May, is at once overly reverential and lacking in confidence. There is too much and too little going on, and the result is not so much a failure as a kind of stillbirth — something that never gathers into the emotional sum of its constituent parts.

Taken individually, those parts are interesting and often moving. As battled-scarred Elliot (Michael Teague) deals with his Puerto Rican family and a dead-end job at a sandwich shop in Philadelphia, we witness the young man's chronic isolation, especially evident his haunting by an Iraqi ghost (Ryan Sayegh). Elliot himself is a kind of ghost, a flickering figure incapable of coming to terms with a violent past and an incomprehensible

present; and his future, therefore, is not just uncertain but terrifying.

Alongside Elliot's story runs that of his estranged mother, Odessa (Zeina Salame), a 12-stepper who runs an online chatroom for recovering crack addicts, a group that includes the sassy Orangutan (Allie Murakami), the middle-aged Chutes & Ladders (Isaiah Nixon) and Fountainhead (Riley Olson), a successful businessman in denial about his habit. As these people seek to connect and heal over vast digital distances, we find a mirror for Elliot's own sense of isolation.

Hudes' play is innovative in the way it juggles this tangle of stories that weaves around and through itself on stage, jumping across geography and time to reveal the source of Elliot's pain. The problem is, the collected stories never gain the necessary momentum. Moments of revelation or catharsis or forgiveness get lost amid a clutter of technique and flourishes, such as the heavy reliance on recorded music to accentuate the jazzy nature of Hudes' narrative style. Scenes occurring simultaneously on stage tend to override each other, blurring the focus for both.

Such over-determination leads to a play that seems bent on proving its relevance rather than telling its tale — a thing more academic than felt. This is understandable: Addiction and PTSD are pervasive contemporary concerns with no easy solution. They touch us all. But UT makes the mistake of turning *Water by the Spoonful* into an object lesson rather than an object of art. — Rick Levin

*Water by the Spoonful* runs through Jan. 31 at UO's Hope Theatre; [tickets.uoregon.edu](http://tickets.uoregon.edu) or 346-4363.

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