

DIE, BART SIMPSON, DIE!

University Theatre goes apocalyptic with *Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play*

M*r. Burns: a Post-Electric Play*, written by Anne Washburn and directed by Tricia Rodley, imagines an eerie future where firelight provides the only illumination and recounting old episodes of *The Simpsons* kindles the only warmth.

Full disclosure: Anne Washburn and I went to the same small liberal arts college. (I started college the same year *The Simpsons* premiered — in 1989.)

And I remember Washburn was a sharp cookie — but a crap stitcher.

We both had jobs in the costume shop, and whereas I dutifully snipped, hemmed and mended — whatever tedium the lead costumer threw at me — Anne just wanted to talk about plays.

Washburn's soft-spoken demeanor belied a sardonic sense of humor, in full-display in *Mr. Burns*, where Homer, Marge, Bart and Lisa are exalted to mythological status.

This play/musical seems prescient, given our loopy moment, with its unicorn frappuccinos and the imminent threat of environmental collapse, nuclear annihilation and the total degradation of society as we know it.

Haha! Just kidding.

Um.

I do wonder sometimes, though, how millennials are coping with mounting threats. They might look to the generation ahead for solace.

Born in the '60s and '70s — and mostly ignored by our parents — we were pretty tough. I don't know if the benign neglect most of us experienced was what helped us get through or if, instead, it was the extraordinary amounts of television we all consumed.

(You kids, with your internet and your fancy phones, will never know the comforting hug of appointment TV.)

In *Mr. Burns*, Washburn cheekily unravels our entertainment DNA.

Jerry Hooker's set casts a home-improvement-store/Dumpster-diving mood. Shelbi Wilkin's found-object costumes delight. (Marge and Lisa's bonkers headdresses are worth the price of admission.)

Janet Rose's lighting creates the glow of an ominous campfire — and sets up a fun visual at the end. (No spoilers.)



THE CAST OF *MR. BURNS: A POST-ELECTRIC PLAY*

Standout performances include Riley Olson as Gibson/Homer, Kelsey Tidball as Jenny/Marge and Kathryn Butler as Lisa. The strong ensemble shines.

This is a whack-a-doo show — not for everyone, but a lot of fun. The script and score are imperfect, and Rodley's direction is draggy in bits, but given the ice-shelf-breaking-oh-my-God-he-has-the-codes-erosion-of-basic-civilities-will-we-all-live-to-see-another-year vibe right now, it's actually quite cathartic.

Two thumbs up from this 1971-vintage audience member.

(Though you young'uns might not get all the TV references.)

Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play runs 8 pm Thursday through Saturday and 2 pm Sunday, June 8-11, at the University of Oregon's Hope Theatre. \$8-\$10, tickets at tickets.uoregon.edu.

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