

EDMONTON JOURNAL

Fringe review: The Hunchbacks of Notre Dame

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The Hunchbacks of Notre Dame

Four Stars



Stage 5, King Edward School

Mon dieu. It's just so damned gratifying to be recognized, finally, for the angry mob we have always been. It's the cathartic moment when we who are "the people from Paris" pelt the cathedral of Notre Dame with "stones," provided beforehand by the helpful cast.

With this cleverly daft new show by Brooklyn's inspired Under The Table trio, (SOLO: A Two Person Show, The Only Friends We Have,) we're in the presence of a highly conceptual production of Victor Hugo's sweeping melodrama, brought to the stage by the Hunchinson Family Players™. This means we're seeing The Hunchback of Notre Dame as done by actual hunchbacks, a giddy new wrinkle in typecasting. (Next: Cats done by cats).

It's fun, and the fun is at the expense of theatre, its pretensions, its lingo, its moves. To see the actor/ playwright/ director/ designer/ choreographer (Josh Matthews) "give notes," in the form of wildly expressive free-form dance, on the tragic universality of Quasimodo's plight and such, in wildly expressive free-form dance, is to laugh really really hard. "The poetry of violence has always intrigued me," he says of his fight choreography. Naturally, he plays Frollo, the conflicted priest.

The upstaging jokes and the subverting of the downer aspects of the script in favour of something "a bit more marketable" by Quasimodo (Matt Chapman) are expertly inexpert, the brilliant physical comedy of dimbulbs, combined with verbal prankishness that never tries too hard.

Phlegmatic sibling sister Hunchinson Hilda (pale, rubber-faced Sarah Petersiel), lukewarm and half-hearted as doomed gypsy girl Esmerelda, is particularly funny. Perpetually a half-beat behind the flow, she casts a baleful eye at the audience, in search of love.

If I tell you it's a musical you'll know that there's resolution, and a sticky ballad. Meanwhile, there's chaos backstage.