

THEATER REVIEW | 'THE MEETING'

October 13, 2011. Hitchcock Hall. Evening.

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Theatergoers crowded the intimate space Thursday night, eager to gain one of the few, and therefore much-coveted seats, for the highly-anticipated new work from theater wunderkind John Bobka. The play, which ran for 31 minutes with no intermission, was an absurdist exploration of Freudian psycholinguistics and mafia dynamics under the pretense of being no more than a house meeting for an undergraduate dormitory at an obscure and disreputable college located somewhere in the culturally-stunted and intellectually stagnant wasteland that we New Yorkers like to refer to as “the rest of the United States.”

Lisa Pawlowicz, who was simply harrowing in her debut role as a fast-and-loose talking young IRS employee, captured the hearts and minds of her audience with zippy one-liners that made the pregnant chick from Juno seem absolutely wan and unfunny in comparison, a comedic charlatan. A charlatan! The audience, in response to Lisa's deadpan delivery of the line, “There are two certainties in life: death, and apple cake. Jessica Stockholder, an artist who creates installation pieces, will be speaking at Masters' Tea tomorrow. There will be cake. On Sunday, we will be screening a film about Nico. There will be cake there also” was worked into such a frenzy that one audience member fell to his knees, crying out and raising his hands in supplication, before being asked by the rest of the audience to “please sit back down.” In response, the man exploded.

Despite the high hilarity of Lisa's utterances, the Freudian underpinnings of her remarks were so heavy-handed as to have made this critic in particular a squicky case of the howling fantods. Bobka affords his viewers no relief though, quickly transitioning to a scene in which Maggie Borowitz sits lotus-style in betwixt the members of the Blue Man Group. Bobka, who is cleverly using Maggie as a means to underscore his appreciation for the Mommy-Daddy-Me triumvirate, has his starlet serenely remark that she will be making apple crisps for study break.

In an abrupt shift of focus, Bobka then begins an exploration of the Vietnam-era sociopolitical landscape in juxtaposing two vice presidents, one of whom (Tyler) proposes a house community service project and the other of whom (Snell VP) threatens nuclear winter should we not forward emails to their listhost. The Snell VP also lets it be known that Hitchcockizens can use the Blue Room to practice their instruments on Tuesdays and weekends.

At about the play's halfway point, Bobka really hits his stride in introducing Ben and Leah, two consiglieri in one of New York's most-feared crime families. Featuring West-Side-Story-type-snapping and hand-wagging, along with Mamet-speak, the scene evolved as follows:

Two figures sit at a table, their faces obscured by the thick smoke emanating from their expensive cigars

Leah: So I says to him, I says – “Hey! You! With the face! Yea, you. C’mere. Look, I’m really sorry about what happened to Mario. Won’t happen again. To make it up to you, howabout some dinner and bowling, this Saturday at 7p? Wait, why you lookin’ scared? Don’t look at me that way, with those big eyes. C’mon – nothing bad has ever happened to anyone at a dinner in which all of the attendees have mob connections. Really.”

Ben: Hah, what shmuck. Listen – did you hear about the message the boss gave to that shmuck who keeps impinging on our territory? So, he goes and, he goes and he has one of his guys leave a note on the shmuck’s windshield. All it says is, it says “Too much light makes the baby go blind.”

Leah: Wait, the boss threatened the guy’s kid? That’s awful. I mean, I know we’re ruthless merchants of death who use blood as currency and let callous bullets act as inter-office memos, but that’s just sinister.

Ben: Oh, no you misunderstand. It’s an invitation to see a comedy troupe on the North Side this Saturday. You see, this shmuck here, this shmuck – he hates theater. He’s a former thespian who almost made it into the Big Time but now he’s just teaching drama to high school kids when he’s not redlighting for the mob. That cat gets one look at that note and he skips town. He skips town because he knows we know. He knows we know that he’s a failed former thespian. And the boss knows that this shmuck’s knowing that we know will be knowledge he can’t stand to know so he’s gonna skip town and quit infringing on our territory.

Leah: Boomsticks. What a shmuck.

The scene dematerializes and we, the transfixed audience members, find ourselves in a conference room at the Vatican, a conference room which is all opulence and rah rah rah and dark mahogany. It is here that a secret society, one which is more pervasive than the Illuminati, more sinister than the Majestic 12 and more devastatingly awful than the Chicago Cubs, meets biweekly for coffee and donuts and small talk.

Cardinal Olson (speaking to the other council members): The shipments are almost ready. The chessboard is set-up and the first move has been made. It was the fianchetto. The game is in play and the pieces are moving. A new world order is underway!

Cardinal Niko: Stage 1 was hugely successful. We won the football game, and dominated at Midnight soccer, 12-0. The referee thought it was unfair that we won by threatening to decimate the Eastern seaboard with a stash of antimatter, but he has been taken care of.

Significant Looks are exchanged between all present. The process is painful to watch, as at least thirty council members are present, and a Significant Look counts as a Significant Look iff it last more than 6 seconds. Each member must Look at the every other member, but no two members may exchange $n > 1$ Significant Looks, for if they do, they will face severe punishment at the hands of a ruthless secret tribunal. This in turn makes each council member a little too afraid, and with good reason I dare say,

to Look up at any other council member, which in turn makes the process of exchanging Significant Looks “Slow Going”. A fortnight elapses.

Cardinal Warden: I realize that many of our number have died from varying shades of hunger and dehydration in the time which we spent looking, or not looking at one another. Though we mourn our fallen comrades, we must press on tirelessly, and for good reason – I have good news. I managed to infiltrate the IHC meeting. Nothing happened. Also, I am pleased that maybe now that many of our members have passed on people will stop pressing me to “Show us what’s underneath your kilt.”

Cardinal Katie: I too have good news. At our most recent PSAC event the ProSpies were well-fed and also infiltrated every part of campus, except for maybe the areas which most accurately reflect student life here, ie the non fun and soul-crushing areas.

Cardinal Baker: Do not take liberties with me. I am not one to be taken in with liberties or to be taken for a liberty, or to be taken at liberty. When I hold up my red sign which says “STOP” in some awful serif typeface, I expect you to stop. I know my rights and I won’t be taken advantage of.

Cardinal Phillips: Brothers and sisters, we have all, by virtue of entering this great body which is the University of Chicago, committed to not letting anyone enter our great bodies. In taking on the mantle of the overworked and underslept scholar we reject the oversexed and overslept-with nature of those at our peer institutions. As such, I can’t understand where all of the condoms have gone. Please stop taking them. We know you are not using them.

Scene.