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Stage News

## Stage Raw: Why Torture is Wrong

By Steven Leigh Morris, Mon., Feb. 8 2010 @ 3:14PM  
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### COMPREHENSIVE THEATER LISTINGS NEW REVIEWS

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[NEW REVIEW](#) GO WHY TORTURE IS WRONG, AND THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM

Photo by Rick Baumgartner

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For the latest [NEW REVIEWS](#) reviewed over the weekend, press the [More](#) tab directly below

[NEW THEATER REVIEWS](#) scheduled to be published February 11, 2010

[NEW REVIEWS](#) COOL NEGROES The opening tableau of writer-director Tony Robinson's "dramedy of generational proportion" is a tumbledown city park circa 1972, where a raucous cadre of black militants is protesting segregation. The revolutionary banter and posturing is soon silenced by police gunfire and the dropping of bodies. After this jarring scene, a flash forward takes us to the present day where the park is a haunt for a group of regulars: college professor Louis (Sammie Wayne, IV); Deborah (Teresa Taylor) a former flower child; Joe (Alex Morris), a city bureaucrat; a gay cop named Mod (Mark Jones); the only caucasian in the group, Eric (Tom Hylar); a Buppie named Al (Dane Diamond); and the irrepressible Mother Barnes (the fine Diane Sellers), a blind sage. Not much transpires here; there is a lot of talking, which, thanks to Robinson's wit and ear for dialogue, somewhat allays the static structure of the play. But one gets the feeling that these entertaining characters overstay their welcome, thanks to a script that is overwritten and languorous. From the mix, Robinson constructs a flimsy storyline about black advancement, interracial romance, political correctness, spiritual redemption, the burden of guilt, and generational angst and conflict. Unfortunately, these motifs are neither skillfully nor insightfully probed. The acting is mostly passable, and Sellers is outstanding. Rounding out the cast are Prema Rosaura Cruz, Tené Carter Miller, and Leslie La'Raine. Stella Adler Theatre, 6773 Hollywood Blvd (2nd floor), Hollywood; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m., Sun., 3 p.m.; thru Feb. 28. (213) 624-4796 A Towne Street Theatre production. (Lovell Estell III)

[NEW REVIEW](#) GO COUSIN BETTE

Photo by Michele K. Short

Drawn from Balzac's La Comedie Humaine, playwright Jeffrey Hatcher's adaptation revolves around a cunning woman's campaign to revenge herself on the rich relatives who have callously dismissed her as shabby and unimportant.

Sheltered, and fed with scraps of food off her pretty cousin's

plate, poor-relation Bette Fischer (Nike Doukas) grows up nurturing her hate, eventually evolving into a plain-faced spinster who is everybody's confidante and nobody's friend. Brilliantly Machiavellian, Bette's fastidious plot to destroy the family involves arranging a liaison between her attractive neighbor and abused wife Valerie (Jen Dede), and Hector (John Prosky) the lecherous and profligate husband of her virtuous cousin, Adeline (Emily Chase). Bette also acquires wealth (and thus power) by promoting the work of a young Polish sculptor, Steinbock (Daniel Bess), whom she's fallen in love with - unfortunately for her, since he ends up betrothed to Adeline's daughter, Hortense (Kellie Matteson). Directed by Jeanie Hackett, the production purposefully underscores the source material's melodramatic elements; for example, heightening the narrative's key points with the melancholy refrains of Chopin. At least one key performance is over laden with shtick, and some fine-tuning of others is in order. Still, Doukas is terrific, delivering a consummate performance that arouses, for her long-suffering deceitful character, pity, disdain -- and admiration. Tony Amendola's licentious merchant is also top-notch. And alongside the story's

bathos is its salient reminder of what cruelty, indifference and injustice can do to the human spirit. (The show is double-cast.) Deaf West Theatre, 5112 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood; Thurs.-Sat., 7:30 p.m.; Sun., 4 p.m.; thru March 21. (818) 506-5436. An Antaeus Company production. (Deborah Klugman)

#### NEW REVIEW GO HAMLET

Photo courtesy of The Porters of Hellsgate

When this Hamlet (Charles Pasternak) says he'll "put an antic disposition on," he really means it. Pasternak's Prince is sometimes maniacal, bounding around and turning somersaults. He brandishes his wit savagely and at times -- as in the closet scene with Gertrude (Jessica Temple) -- he can be downright brutal. He's particularly good in the comic scenes with Rosencrantz (director Thomas Bigley) and Guildenstern (Gus Krieger). There's not much of the "sweet prince" about him, but it's a performance that works. He receives solid support from Temple, Jack Leahy, doubling as Claudius and the Ghost, Jamey Hecht as Polonius,

and Taylor Fisher as Ophelia. Director Bigley provides a mostly direct and straightforward production, despite a few gaffes: the First Actor's speech about Pyrrhus is so tricked out with superfluous business that it's both awkward and absurd. On the plus side, Bigley gives us a generous portion of the text, tactfully edited. Costumer Jessica Pasternak is clearly battling budgetary limitations, but her decision to try to convert modern men's suits into period costumes is more distracting than helpful. It's a long evening (over 3 hours) but an engrossing one. The Flight Theatre, 6472 Santa Monica Boulevard. Produced by The Porters of Hellsgate. Thurs. & Sat., 8 p.m.; thru Feb. 13. Playing in repertory with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead. (951) 262-3030 (Neal Weaver)

#### NEW REVIEW PARADISE STREET

Photo courtesy of Title3

Title3 is a new company dedicated to giving women strong, unusual, fascinating roles. For their first production, they've chosen Constance Congdon's dark sociological piece about class resentment and privilege. Jane (Molly Leland), a brilliant, assured and beautiful professor of gender and

semiotics -- who drops phrases like "The nomenclature of the patriarchal case for hegemony" as easily as ordering a club sandwich -- has just moved to a small college town with her self-centered elderly mother (Danielle Kennedy). Just before the semester starts, Jane's battered into a coma by a homeless woman (Lane Allison, in a menacing portrayal), who's bitter at being one of society's invisibles. As Jane struggles to make at best a partial recovery from irreversible brain damage, her attacker steals Jane's identity, and is delighted to find that she's treated as an icon. (At conferences, she's paid \$1000 to sit on stage and grunt one word answers like Buddha -- let the masses, or the critics, figure out what she means. It's true: the Haves get more while the Have-nots suffer. The mechanics of Congdon's plot don't make a lick of sense, but we're hooked by the premise, and by director Courtney Munch's great ensemble -- filled out by Jiehae Park, Jane Montosi and Lorene

Chesley in a variety of roles. By intermission, however, the play has made its point. It nonetheless continues to pad along, wedging in scenes where a Puerto Rican social worker shows Jane's mother how to use a Kegel exerciser, one of Montosi's characters silently mops an entire floor, and the homeless attacker babysits her publisher's drug-addicted daughter. To paraphrase a program note, Congdon needs to appraise this two-and-a-half hour muddle and chip away everything that doesn't look like the very smart play about class tensions buried inside. The Attic Theatre and Film Center, 5429 W. Washington Blvd., L.A.; opens Jan. 29; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 p.m.; thru Feb. 21. (323) 525-0661. A Title3 production. (Amy Nicholson)

#### NEW REVIEW THE PEACOCK MEN

Photo courtesy of Company of Angels

Deconstructing American masculinity can be a sticky thicket even in the best of analyses. Add issues of race and representation to the mix, however, and its order of complexity increases exponentially. So it's no surprise that playwright Ronald McCants'

idea-packed, satiric foray into the psychic minefield of black male identity can be as profoundly disorienting as it is provocative. For McCants' hapless cast of circus-performing Peacock Men -- African-Americans who, like their brilliantly plumed namesake, have been domesticated into gender-warped docility -- the ride is also downright deadly. One performer, Robert Mapplethorpe's horse-hung The Man in the Polyester Suit (Hari Williams), has already succumbed after his reduction to an erotically objectified exhibit and his mysterious disappearance by the sadistic, white-faced Ringmaster, Steve (Will Dixon). So when avaricious street rapper Cash (Chris P. Daniels) signs on as a replacement, he finds himself with a job both physically and existentially more perilous than he bargained for. Turns out Steve's circus is more of a torture funhouse in which Cash and his cohorts (John J. Jordan & Michael A. Thompson) are subjected to humiliations and acts of violence scripted right out of real-world headlines (Rodney King, Amadou Diallo, etc.). And while Ayana Cahr's staging loses crucial dramatic momentum during some of the play's lengthier, overly didactic passages (the show could easily benefit from a judicious, 30-minute trim), McCants' nightmare vaudeville proves a field day for its terrifically talented ensemble. Company of Angels, Alexandria Hotel, 501 S. Spring St., downtown; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 7 p.m.; thru March 7. (323) 883-1717. (Bill Raden)

NEW REVIEW SOUVENIR The fascinating idea at the heart of Stephen Temperley's bio-comedy is the gaping divide between the music we hear in our hearts, and that same music heard by those around us. In the early 20th century, Florence Foster Jenkins made a career as an opera diva in New York, evidently oblivious that she couldn't sing in tune. Not only could she not manufacture a note anywhere near what others would call on pitch, she also couldn't hear the mocking laughter of her audiences. According to Temperley's play, she was in love with the music she heard in her head, as well as the fame it brought her via record sales and concert appearances. This is what makes the imperious stridency of Constance Hauman's performance as Jenkins so endearing. Unfortunately, every interesting insight the play offers gets overly narrated to us by her accompanist, Cosmo McMoon (Brent Schindele, who's terrific on the baby grand that anchors Mike Jespersen's set), and the two-character drama hangs on his moral struggle and failure to tell the truth to his employer, and thereby cash in on her delusions. Even with its elegant production design, including an NYC skyline that pops up when needed via slide projections, and Nick McCord's delicate lighting design, Gregg W. Brevvort's production is a one-trick pony. In her various songs and arias, rather than pursuing the elusive notes, which would create an excruciating tension from a musical game of cat-and-mouse, Hauman is (deliberately) seven miles away, and remains so. Meanwhile, Schindele's accompanist too often mugs his expressions of horror, when a more muted, droll response would not only be funnier, it would underscore his hidden agenda. The result is one very obvious joke about the essences of delusion, which are anything but obvious. Falcon Theater, 4252 Riverside Dr., Burbank; Wed.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 4 p.m.; thru Feb. 28. (818) 955-8101. (Steven Leigh Morris)

#### NEW REVIEW TWELFTH NIGHT

Photo courtesy of Chalk  
Repertory Company

The idea of traipsing through a dark, damp graveyard on a weekend night to watch a Shakespeare play may be a daunting prospect, but at least audiences who attend director Jerry Ruiz's smooth and energetic production will be assured of seeing an engaging rendition of one of the Bard's jolliest comedies. The show is actually presented inside the picturesque (and grave-free) Masonic Lodge on the cemetery property, which provides a striking, dramatic backdrop for any play. (The beautifully constructed, colorfully decorated ceiling beams of the auditorium are worth seeing, even aside from the play.) Viola (Hilary Ward) dresses in drag to serve Count Orsino (Owiso Odera) and falls in love with him, but the

woman Orsino has his eye on, beautiful Olivia (Teri Reeves), falls for Viola. Meanwhile, Olivia's drunkard Uncle, Sir Toby Belch (Matt Gaydos) and his ne'er do well pals play a mean spirited prank on Olivia's prissy, Puritan steward Malvolio (Charles Janasz). Ruiz's staging is both intelligently introspective and energetic, even though some of the comic shtick doesn't seem to naturally flow from the text and comes across as being weakly timed. Still, the production possesses a commendable clarity, which itself makes it a fine, competently rendered version of the show. It also boasts some remarkably well defined character work. Reeves's nicely brittle Olivia warms amusingly to Ward's befuddled Viola, while Guilford Adams's glum fool Feste plays nicely off of Gaydos's decadent Sir Toby. However, it's Janasz's brilliantly uptight Malvolio, and his ghoulishly hilarious attempts to woo Olivia all cross gartered and leering like a gassy Jack O'Lantern, that truly offers this show's standout performance. Hollywood Forever Cemetery, 6000 Santa Monica Blvd, Hollywood: Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 7 p.m.; thru Feb. 28. (800) 838-3006. Chalk Repertory Company. (Paul Birchall)

#### NEW REVIEW WHO IS CURTIS LEE?

Photo by Lynne Conner

The titular question of this play by Ashford J. Thomas (who also plays Curtis Lee) set in 1950s Greensboro, North Carolina is sparked by the appearance of a young man in a ramshackle tavern who immediately attracts the attention of regulars Herman (Gerrence George) and Otis (Carl Crudup), as well as owner Joe (Logan Alexander). Despite his shabby appearance, the visitor Curtis claims to be a songwriter for radio icon Miss Wanda Denise (Kelley Chatman), as well as being a boxer. Herman and Otis don't buy either story, but Curtis' buying them drinks keeps them

moined. Unfortunately Curtis has no money, bringing him into conflict with the normally staid

Joe, who, after threatening Curtis, takes pity on him and puts him to work. Complicating this situation are Calvin Hunt (Richard Lewis Warren), a greedy white developer trying to force Joe to sell the place, Mitchell (James E. Hurd, Jr.), a black gangster to whom Curtis owes money, and Angel (Paris Rumford), Otis' ironically-named promiscuous daughter. Director L. Flint Esquerra skillfully mines the comedy in the text, and Paul Koslo's weathered set provides an authentic mise-en-scène. Alexander shines in his gruff, pained portrayal of Joe, Crudup and George have solid comic timing, and Hurd, Jr. is menacing in his brief appearance. Thomas delivers the sincerity and hotheaded anger of youth, but his writing, characterized by powerful, resonant themes, doesn't always cohere. MET Theatre, downstairs in the Great Scott Theatre, 1089 N. Oxford Ave., Hollywood; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m.; thru February 28. (323) 957-1152.

[www.themettheatre.com](http://www.themettheatre.com) A Thought Collective Productions Production. (Mayank Keshaviah)

**NEW REVIEW GO WHY TORTURE IS WRONG, AND THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM**

Photo by Rick Baumgartner

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**NEW REVIEW GO WRECKS**

Photo courtesy of the Geffen Playhouse

The loaded situation in writer-director Neil LaBute's "love

story" allows for a kind of velvet glove to reach inside one's heart, and then it swirls around the intestines for a while before making its withdrawal. This leaves us, well, touched, but in a way that's far from sentimental. Ed Harris stars in this monologue, set in a Northern Illinois funeral home. His wife's casket forms the centerpiece of Sibyl Wickersheimer's set - her photo perched on its lid. Cricket S. Meyers' sound design offers the whispers and echoes of voices in an ante-room, where our bereaved widower Ed Carr (Harris) ostensibly floats - that would be his public self. But that's not what we're seeing. He refers to himself being "back there" with "them" while he

speaks to us through the mirror of his subconscious. What we get is his real eulogy, with the secrets he won't tell them, because he's a private person, he insists. (There are some secrets, such as his wife's final four words, that he won't tell us, either.) He has a blazingly clear reason to be so private, and that's the melodramatic revelation near play's end that forces us to confront the definition of love, and how that definition rubs up against social propriety. I didn't buy that revelation, not within the colloquial, ruminative and realistic confines of LaBute's direction. But that's a small matter. The big matter is the gorgeous combination of LaBute's digressive and piercingly insightful love letter with Harris' tender-furious child-like and ultimately profound interpretation. Ed Carr is a bit like a chain-smoking Dostoevskian narrator, who, while drifting onto free-associated topics and bilious commentary (on anti-smoking campaigns, for example), he is, finally, on message. And his message about the essence of love is upsetting and unimpeachable in the same breath. Geffen Playhouse, Tues.-Fri., 8 p.m.; Sat, 3 & 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 p.m.; thru March 7. (310) 208-5454. (Steven Leigh Morris)

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## Comments (2)

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**Beth Berman says:**

It wasn't his wife's final four words; it is his own words to her that are never told. I liked this performance, and Ed Harris is so excellent, you hang on every word and glance.

Posted On: Wednesday, Feb. 10 2010 @ 12:34AM

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**Alida Damoth says:**

The greatest portion about grants for school is that you can get totally free money in order to pay for your degree. indicates certainly not makesIf you simply got an associates level, which requires around 2 many years or 4 semesters of time, then you could make over \$10,000 a lot more per year in comparison to if you just graduate from higher school.

Posted On: Friday, Aug. 20 2010 @ 4:41PM

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