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Theater Review: Bach At Leipzig: A Hilarious Farce

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Any time Artist Director Ron Sossi's name is associated with a production, you can be sure you are in for a fasten-your-seat-belt evening of theatre at the famed Odyssey Theatre Ensemble, one of Los Angeles' most distinguished companies. *Bach At Leipzig* is yet another notch on Sossi's excellent production belt.

The setting for this outrageous Moliere-inspired farce is outside the Thomaskirche in Leipzig in the year 1722. Following the death of the famous organist Johann Kuhnau, seven composers have been summoned to compete for that position, the most prestigious in all of Germany, carrying with it a salary and the ability to influence trends in music, culture, and even politics of the Holy Roman Empire. And compete they do using blackmail, skulduggery, betrayal, tomfoolery, backstabbing, and just about any ploy they can think of to win this coveted post.

The opening monologue by Johann Friedrich Fasch, played with elegance and eloquence by Rob Nagle, lays the groundwork for the slapstick antics that are to follow in this most satisfying, marvelously written farce by Itamar Moses. A former student of the deceased musician, Fasch had broken away from his master due to sharp differences on how to serve God through music. The silliness begins as Fasch reads aloud a letter to his wife Anna, "By the time you receive this letter, I will have sent it."

Each of the characters read beautifully crafted letters discussing their views on music, politics, and religion giving the audience exposition in quite a humorous fashion. The letters are then dispatched by imaginary carrier pigeon, a running sight gag throughout the play, with at least one of the pigeons ending up as food instead reaching the correct "mailbox."

Other members of this very gifted cast playing "despicable," but lovable characters include the scheming con artist who desperately needs this post to restore some credibility to his life, the knifing George Lenck, played with great gusto by Dominic Conti, and Henry Clarke's delightful sexually overactive scoundrel dressed in gentlemen's attire, Johann Martin Steindorff. The balance of this perfect ensemble is comprised of Michael Cavanaugh as George Phillip Telemann, Bill Brochtrup as Johann Christoph Graupner, and the down-trodden Georg Balthasar Schott, played with just the right amount of guile by Joel Polis. An especially hilarious performance is given by Leland Crooke as the daffy Georg Friedrich Kaufman who has trouble distinguishing reality, mistaking some of the cloak-and-dagger plotting as rehearsals for a play. (You might have noted that each of the characters is named either Georg or Johann.)

The production values are sensational with stunning period costumes by A. Jeffrey Schoenberg, complimented by the excellent set by Kurt Boetcher, lighting design by Dan Jenkins, sound by Philip White, and fight choreographer Bill Madden. It should be noted that the assortment of wigs fit the personality of each character, adding a hilarious touch to a comedic evening of theatre.

Directed with lightning timing and the utmost of skill by Darin Anthony, it is indeed refreshing to see a Equity-waiver play where the actors in the ensemble are highly professional, trained in theatre arts,

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move with grace and style, and articulate the English language with sharp clarity. Put this play on your must-see list.

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Bach At Leipzig


Odyssey Theatre Ensemble

2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd

Los Angeles, CA 90025

Run: Wed. – Sun. Thru Aug. 23

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