

[← Back to Original Article](#)

THEATER BEAT

## Spending time with Saroyan

May 26, 2006 | Charlotte Stoudt

William Saroyan's 1939 Pulitzer Prize-winning meander of a play "The Time of Your Life" is a kind of Depression-era "Cheers" in which drunks, streetwalkers and other down-at-the-heelers collect at Nick's bar in San Francisco -- a place, its owner proudly declares, where "important people never come."

Open Fist's appealing production, directed simply (if a little stolidly) by Stefan Novinski, makes terrific use of the company's new home, the warehouse space formerly occupied by the Actors' Gang. You can almost smell the sawdust and corn nuts on designer Donna Marquet's sprawling, knockabout saloon of a set, and A. Jeffrey Schoenberg's smart period costumes buzz with visual wit.

Never mind the dime-novel plot -- whether the heart-of-glass hooker will go straight with a good-hearted lunkhead -- this is an ensemble piece that lives or bores on casting. Happily, the 22-member, engagingly goofball cast is anchored around two finely pitched performances: a no-frills Michael Patrick McGill as Nick and the ever-interesting Michael Franco as Joe, the bar's champagne-soaked resident philosopher and financier.

Saroyan's vision of Americans on the fringes of their dreams veers toward the sentimental, but the playwright's ear for street poetry rarely steers him wrong. In fact, the whole show is more overheard than played, a heady linguistic brew of slang, lopsided folkisms, and that ultimate American speech mode, the pitch. Those with limited attention spans may be vastly annoyed by the play's leisurely pace; others willing to kick back and get comfortable will be amply rewarded by Saroyan's enduring, bittersweet lyricism.

"The Time of Your Life" Open Fist Theatre Company, 6209 Santa Monica Boulevard, Hollywood. 8 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, 7 p.m. Sundays. Ends July 1. \$15-20. (323) 882-6912. Running time: 2 hours, 45 minutes.