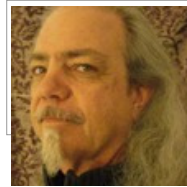


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Austinist Reviews: *Mr. Marmalade*



[This review comes from new contributor Anna Hanks! -Ed.]

In our culture, children are usually considered innocent until sullied by the grown-up world. Otherwise, why would we have family-friendly TV programming, G-rated movies, and continual furor about “inappropriate” books being taught in public schools? Noah Haidle’s dark little comedy, *Mr. Marmalade*, brilliantly twists the preconception of childhood innocence into an inspired script.

We attended the final weekend of this just-closed, Capital T Theatre production at Hyde Park Theatre.

Directed by **Mark Pickell**, the show deftly details the dark relationship between lonely four-year-old Lucy (**Tiny Robinson**) and her twisted imaginary friend, the title character Mr. Marmalade (**David L. Bowers**).

Frenetic and wired, the gifted Bowers rocked the stage. His riveting “Mr. M” bounded around the small living-room set as the demanding, manic-depressive center of attention. In a parody of the grown-up world, Mr. M’s traumatized personal assistant Bradley schedules tea parties and play dates days in advance. **Noah Neal** gives a spot-on performance as the underling, in thrall to an abusive and volatile boss.

Neither Mr. M nor Bradley can be seen by the preoccupied adults in Lucy’s life. That’s good. With his briefcase full of illicit pick-me-ups and sex toys, Mr. M isn’t the type of imaginary friend to reassure concerned parents. Then again, Lucy’s mother (**Annie Dragoo**) isn’t what you’d call “concerned”. Leaving for her date and deprived of a baby sitter, she asks wee Lucy to “hold down the fort” ‘til the sitter arrives. That’s parenting in the world of *Mr. Marmalade*.

Between being left alone, and exposed to her mother’s creepy dates the morning after, you wouldn’t call Lucy’s childhood exactly....childlike. Her humdrum life is enlivened by the mid-play appearance of five-year-old, petty criminal Larry (**Chase Wooldridge**)—the youngest-ever attempted suicide in New Jersey. After being dragged into the action as the babysitter’s boyfriend’s little brother, the morose Larry bonds with Lucy. Soon he’s introducing her to his pals: a crazed Sunflower (**Matt Hislope**) and a wacky Cactus (**Ash Bell**) whose zippy performances as potted...yet destructive...party guests was a highlight of the show.

While Bowers’ Mr. M provided the play’s pop and pizzazz, Robinson, constantly onstage, carried the intermission-free production. Her expressive face helped convey her take on the childish Lucy—as well as the darker aspects of the play. “If this is the carefree part of my life, I don’t want to see the part that is supposed to be hard,” Lucy tells us. The play ends with the darker side of make-believe, complete with a marriage-gone-wrong scenario and Lucy ruining her mother’s slip with blood, er, ketchup. Lucy’s fantasy world can be a dark, dark place. Then again, so can the actual grown-up world.

While we were impressed with this engaging production, we noticed some sound issues. Most problematic were the lines setting up scenes, broadcast over the PA during set changes, which were identifiable only as a child

talking, rather than as coherent sentences. However, playing the whistled introduction to Peter, Bjorn and John's summer hit "Young Folks" just before and after the show was a nice touch.

We're sad if you missed the show because, just like its namesake condiment, this production of *Mr. Marmalade* was a bittersweet concoction that left a tangy and distinct impression. Keep your eyes peeled for the next Capital T Production, Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*, coming in October to Hyde Park Theatre.

Contact the author of this article or email tips@austinist.com with further questions, comments or tips.

By Jooley Ann in Arts and Entertainment on September 4, 2007 3:25 PM

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