

Culture Watch

By Sarah A. Spitz

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COWBOYS AND ALIENS

The Odyssey Theatre Ensemble created “Circa 69” Season to celebrate its 50th anniversary, featuring significant and adventurous plays that premiered in 1969, around the time of the company’s founding.

Director Darrell Larson takes the helm of two one-acts by the inimitable Sam Shepard, with whom he worked closely over many years. Two one-acts “Killer’s Head” and “The Unseen Hand” are performed back to back, moving from the last moments of a man in an electric chair to an absurdist sci-fi comedy, featuring an alien who comes to Earth to recruit a trio of bandit brothers to save his people.

In *Killer’s Head*, performed by a rotating cast, a man strapped to an electric chair in his final moments gives a stream-of-consciousness monologue about trucks and horses. Opening night featured Steve Howey (best-known for Showtime’s “Shameless” as hunky barkeep Kevin), and upcoming are Dermot Mulroney, Magnus Jackson Diehl, Jeff Kober, Darrell Larson and Jonathan Medina.

In “The Unseen Hand,” Blue Morphan (Carl Weintraub) is a 120-year old drunk

cowboy and former outlaw living in a broken down, rusty car on the side of a road in Azusa. He’s sought after across two galaxies by alien Willie (an astoundingly energetic Matt Curtin), who needs Blue and his brothers to save his people from their overlords, who control them by means of an unseen hand that stifles their thoughts when they think of revolting.

Willie brings Blue’s brothers Cisco (Jordan Morgan) and Sycamore (Chris Payne Gilbert) back to life. Meanwhile a gay high school athlete (Andrew Morrison) is booted out of a car by school bullies, landing in the middle of all this, raging about how he’s going to kill the other team and outlining tactics for guerrilla warfare.

While it’s a pretty weird and ultimately hysterical romp with some seriously tour-de-force monologues by Willie and The Kid, director Larson says the play is, in part, about versions of toxic masculinity.

The plays will be onstage through March 8th. The Odyssey Theatre is located at 2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd., West LA. Visit <http://www.odyesseytheatre.com> for tickets and info.

Sarah A. Spitz is an award-winning public radio producer, retired from KCRW, where she also produced arts stories for NPR. She writes features and reviews for various print and online publications.