



'Kooza,' 'Skin of Our Teeth' provide ongoing theatrical fireworks

By Ed Huyck | Published Wed, Jul 8 2009 8:40 am

Two very different kinds of spectacle opened right before the Fourth of July in the Twin Cities. While Cirque du Soleil made a bigger splash in St. Paul with its latest show, "Kooza," the local folks at Girl Friday Productions presented their own, more intellectual, fireworks with Thorton Wilder's "Skin of Our Teeth" at the Minneapolis Theater Garage.

Cirque's immersion begins from the moment the audience arrives at the company's giant tent at the corner of Broadway and Kellogg, as once the audience is within the giant circus tent, they are greeted with performers in wild costumes and on stilts. There are tricks to see, and merchandise to buy of course.

"Kooza" has the Cirque du Soleil hallmarks: world-class acrobatics, bizarre costumes, a story that mainly gets in the way and punishingly loud music. It's really the first that draws in the audience, and in that regard "Kooza" doesn't disappoint.

The show-stopper opening night (and most likely any night) was the "Wheel of Death," as a pair of performers -- decked out like refugees from a Norwegian black metal band -- defied safety and sanity by performing within, and then on top of, a pair of wheels that spun high into the tent and then back down again. Think of an amusement-park ride, where the most fun is in the moments of free fall. Now, put yourself on the outside of that ride, and then try to use a jump rope while not falling to the hard ground below.

"Kooza" sticks close to circus traditions -- with Cirque du Soleil touches, of course -- and that includes plenty of clowning. In fact, I could have gone for quite a bit less. While Lee Thompson's pickpocket routine was plenty of fun, other bits involving the "king" and his foolish court did nothing but interrupt the more interesting action. In the end, it's an overwhelming, almost exhausting experience, but one worth taking in if it fits the budget.

"Kooza" runs through Aug. 2. Tickets are \$42 to \$215. For information and tickets, call 1-800-450-1480 or visit [online](#).

Girl Friday Productions may be a local group, but its shows are as rare

as Cirque du Soliel tours. The company's last show was in 2007, a critically acclaimed (including by this critic) "Our Town."

It returns to the Wilder well with "Skin of Our Teeth," which even further muddles the line between performer, audience and artifice than "Our Town." This time, Wilder condenses the human experience down to three one-act explorations. In each, the Antrobus family tries to make their way in the world, while facing calamity at each turn. Yet this isn't just an all-American family. Instead, they represent humanity as a whole, and the calamities they face include possible extinction -- from an ice age, a flood of Biblical proportions and, finally, a massive war.

Mr. Antrobus is the great inventor, while his wife is the ultimate mother, protecting her children at every turn. They're more than typical teenagers, however, considering that "Henry" went by a different name at one time -- a name indicated by the scar on his forehead. And there's an eternal temptress as well, Sabina, who always tries to take Mr. Antrobus away, but ends up back in the kitchen.

It's all a heady brew, especially since "Skin of Our Teeth" is also presented as a play-in-progress, with direct addresses to the audience, actors running off in tantrums and last-second cast changes. It would be easy to just go with the artifice, but the talented and experienced company makes every moment here work, no matter if they are playing their characters, the actors or the actors trying to find their characters. The production, directed by Benjamin McGovern, is presented cleanly and with some of the more intense moments presented as much in the mind as on stage.

Here, the fireworks are more in the mind, as "The Skin of Our Teeth" forces you to confront what human history means, and how we have survived so long through so many calamities and so much chaos.

"The Skin of Our Teeth" runs through July 25 at the Minneapolis Theater Garage, Franklin and Lyndale avenues, Minneapolis. Tickets are \$20. For information, call 612-729-1071 or visit [online](#).

Like what you just read? [Support high-quality journalism in Minnesota](#) by becoming a member of MinnPost.

Advertisement:



0 Comments:

E-mail address

Password

Remember me for two weeks.

Log In

[Forgot Password?](#) | [Register to Comment](#)

MinnPost does not permit the use of foul language, personal attacks or the use of language that may be libelous or interpreted as inciting hate or sexual harassment. User comments are reviewed by moderators to ensure that comments meet these standards and adhere to MinnPost's [terms of use](#) and [privacy policy](#).

We intend for this area to be used by our readers as a place for civil, thought-provoking and high-quality public discussion. **In order to achieve this, MinnPost requires that all commenters register and post comments with their actual names and place of residence.** [Register here](#) to comment.