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The Anyway Cabaret

📅 October 20, 2014 👤 Tom Williams

Music and Book by Martin Marion

Directed by
Jacqueline Stone

Produced by
TUTA Theatre Chicago



Presented in association with the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events

This is the Anyway Cabaret/ We play it our way, in the animal way/ Only people play in a cabaret/ and we are animals, but we play it anyway

Delightful New Work about Animals Struggling to Survive

The Anyway Cabaret (an animal cabaret) is a strange but funny new musical from the creative team at TUTA. An amazingly

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Theatre Reviewer needed

Looking for a theatre fanatic who wants to write reviews about local Chicago stage plays for this site. No experience necessary, only a passion for the performing arts and good writing ability. Access to a car for some shows—have assignments most nights and on weekends. 2-3 shows per week possible. Strict deadlines a must. Send resume and a writing

talented cast of ten accompany each other in songs about animals that range from goofy to very sad.



The show bills itself as “haunting” and “life or death.” It does eventually work up to that, but I think the biggest obstacle for the audience is accepting that ambition along with the show’s silly humor. We open with a prim deer (Sean Ewert) scampering from the sound of a gunshot. He is then approached by the nine musicians, dressed in a mixture of black and white striped cabaret costumes and animal prints, who sing the show’s main anthem. It’s a rather menacing presentation, sung in a minor key under red lighting and with big smiles, about defying the ban against animals expressing themselves. But then the next songs are about a rabbit’s obsession with carrots and how surprisingly much kangaroos poop.

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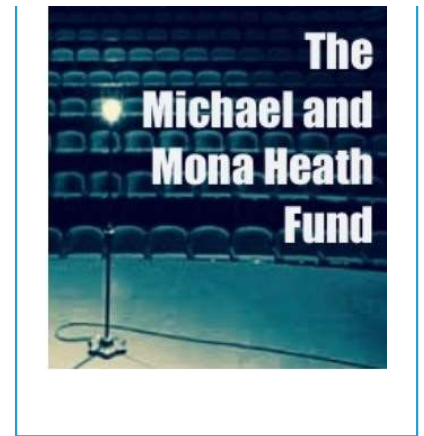
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The deer speaks for the audience when he points out that the other animals aren't making a very good case for themselves. But he's intrigued by their idea, and suggests that, hypothetically, telling a deer's story could raise the cabaret's artistic value. Things get a little more serious when a melancholy skunk (Brando Crawford) sings to his adoring skunkettes about how he refuses to be ashamed of his smell, even though it causes him to face discrimination. This song also raises the show's musical and movement complexity.



Later songs, starting with that of a goat (Tanou s El-Kareh) who is

doomed to be a coat, detail the deadly violence the animals must face daily. The show never loses its silly humor, but it does incorporate more serious motifs about celebrating life even while facing certain death. I especially enjoyed Marsha Harman as a babushka-lady turtle who lays so many eggs because most of her children get made into soup, and Amber Robinson as a pig who disguises herself with a wig. Of course, the deer frequently points

out that animals are killed by each other, not just by humans, so this show isn't some kind of vegetarian agit-prop. It's more about having the courage to accept death, and perform even though it makes you a target.

The biggest accomplishment of the show is the vast array of instruments and musical genres the cast play. I noticed the use of an accordion, kazoos, a ukulele, and a mandolin, among other more conventional instruments, like a piano, sound mixer, and rattles. TUTA bills The Anyway Cabaret as "folk rock," in addition to company associate member Martin



Marion's music hall and cabaret style songs. There are also a few spoken-word pieces. Director Jacqueline Stone and music director Wain Parham have the ensemble working beautifully together through sometimes rapid changes.

Joanna Iwanicka used a simple set design to turn the Storefront into an effective cabaret. A red, all capitalized "Anyway" sign glares boldly down from one side of the stage, while pieces of abstract animal costumes hang high above the audience closer to the doors. Branimira Ivanova's playful costumes suggest animals without taking too much literally. Most of the changes are covered by debates between the deer and the emcee (Ian Knox), which while obvious, are enjoyable to listen to.

I'm not sure why TUTA felt the need to recommend this show for ages thirteen and up, and I think that's a mistake. Other than the possible length issue, I see nothing really unsuitable for middle schoolers. Perhaps they thought the designation "children's show" that typically comes from animal themes would scare away

adult audiences. But I think this show will succeed with people of all ages. It's an excellent example of Chicago-generated new work in terms of creativity and ensemble performance, and it carries a life-affirming message even in the face of grim reality.

Highly Recommended

Jacob Davis

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Reviewed October 17, 2014

For more information, see The Anyway Cabaret's page at [Theater in Chicago](#).

Plays at the Storefront Theatre, 66 East Randolph Street, Chicago, Ill. Visit www.tix.com or call 1-800-595-4849 for tickets, or see <http://www.tutato.com/> for more information. Tickets are \$15. Show is 2 hours long with one intermission. Runs Oct 17-November 16. Plays Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 7:30 pm, and Sunday at 2:00 pm. Recommended for children thirteen and up.

