

The mortal charms of TUTA's "Anyway Cabaret"

MUSIC 11/07/2014, 11:39pm

Hedy Weiss

@HedyWeissCritic | email

The subtitle of "The Anyway Cabaret" — TUTA's quirky, shrewdly playful world premiere musical frolic that runs for just two more weekends at The Storefront Theatre — is "an animal cabaret." And yes, it is full of characters from the barnyard, the forest and the sea, but like all fables, it is very much a human story — a sly, engaging look at biology, psychology, the hunter and the hunted, the eater and the eaten, and, of course, that inevitable endgame, mortality.

"THE ANYWAY CABARET (an animal cabaret)"

RECOMMENDED

When: Through Nov. 16

Where: TUTA at the Storefront Theater, 66 E. Randolph

Tickets: \$15

Info: (800) 595-4849; www.tutato.com

Run time: 2 hours with one intermission



Sponsored by Booking.com

Montréal - Hotel Elegant**

Best Price Guarantee

AdChoices

See More

The creation of writer/composer Martin Marion (who was born in Slovenia, studied in the United States, spent 10 years performing with Blue Man Group and currently lives in Berlin), the show is marked by TUTA's decidedly Eastern European/Slavic sensibility mixed with a hip rock 'n' roll-meets-ethnic beat. And as cleverly

directed by Jacqueline Stone — with zesty musical direction by Wain Parham and wildly ingenious costumes by Branimira Ivanova— it spins a cautionary tale at the very same time that it entertains. The cast of 10 appealing performers — many of whom accompany themselves or others on instruments ranging from accordion, guitar and drum to tambourine, ukelele and kazoo — move easily from creatures who are rowdy and bawdy to those who are mournful and scared.

ADVERTISING

Joanna Iwanicka's clever set (with aptly atmospheric lighting by Keith Parham) gives us a runway-like stage with the audience seated on either side, and Ivanova's colorful costumes suspended from hooks so the actors can make many quick transformations.

The proverbial Deer in the headlights, alternately shy and critical, and strangely unaware of the dangers that lurk for him, is played by Sean Ewert. But every creature has his or her day in the spotlight.

Laura Demarath is the Cow with “the know how,” who chews and moos with winning confidence. Brandon Crawford is the Skunk very much aware of his off-putting odor, although as a rocker he easily manages to attract three power-voiced Skunkettes (Demarath, Marsha Harman and Amber Robinson) for backup. These ladies, along with Thea Lux, also morph into Hens with Pens, singing about how their feathers are plucked for quills. And Harman, who dons a wire mesh shell to become Turtle, touchingly sings of why she must lay so many eggs, while Robinson makes a sassy Pig in a Wig.

Brando Crawford is the Skunk.

Doubling as the confident emcee

and Bear Without a Care is the barrel-chested Ian Knox , with Isaac Samuelson as a Fish in a bodysuit of golden scales who is quite full of himself, Tanous El-Kareh as a Goat, and Dave Fink as a bumptious Kangaroo who is proud of his poo. And so it goes.

The show (recommended for ages 13 and up, and I wouldn't bring anyone younger) could benefit from a trim. At moments it becomes just a bit too precious and repetitious. But, as one-by-one of these animals with vivid personalities disappears into the darkness — some shot, some devoured, some dead of natural causes — “The Anyway Cabaret” makes its point. Its final song is a blunt “Goodbye,” and after all the eccentric, earthy fun, you are left to face the finality of all living things, including yourself.