

Non-stop fun while waiting for *Alias Godot* to make sense

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Alias Godot

Theatre: Theatre Network at the Roxy Theatre, 10708 124th St.

Directed by: Bradley Moss

Written by: Brendan Gall

Starring: Julien Arnold, Brian Dooley, Christopher Schulz, Collin Doyle, James Hamilton

Running: Thursday through Oct. 12

Tickets: 780-453-2440 or Tix on the Square (420-1757)



CREDIT: Ian Jackson, EPIC Photography
 Brian Dooley and James Hamilton take aim in *Alias Godot*.

EDMONTON -- The mysterious man in the bowler getting roughed up by a couple of twitchy New York cops eventually speaks: "I was told I have the right to remain silent."

Well, no kidding. The name is Godot, the most famous no-show in theatre. And the engine and chief joke of Brendan Gall's *Alias Godot* is that there's actually a very good reason Samuel Beckett's tramps spent the entire duration of *Waiting For Godot*, the most influential play of the last century, hanging around waiting for the guy, is that he was, er, assisting police with their inquiries.

The aptly named Gall (he must get that a lot), who's young and from Toronto, and who will actually show up in person for a Theatre Network play later this season, imagines the modern existential impasse nailed by Beckett through the lens of the modern cop show.

In *Alias Godot*, Beckett is having a beer with Tarantino, so to speak. And the results, judging by the zany energy of Bradley Moss's excellent production, include a tip of the bowler to the scabrous farces of Joe Orton.

How on earth do you interrogate, or even intimidate, someone as enigmatic

as Julien Arnold's dapper, quizzical, mild-mannered Godot when he can't remember his own first name ("Mister?" he wonders). Godot is so baffling he even baffles himself. Menace doesn't work with him. "I swear to God ..." says Vince (Brian Dooley), the thuggier of the cops, itching to do some damage. "If there's a god," amends his captive. All he knows is that he's supposed to be somewhere, with a package: "If I don't arrive quickly, they're likely to endow my absence with undue significance."

A considerable quantity of Act I fun is generated by watching Dooley's grizzled, paunchy Vince get madder and madder, tortured jointly by impenetrably guileless one-liners from the Chaplin-esque Godot and the bungling of his dimmer but nicer partner Edward, played with loose-limbed haplessness by Christopher Schulz. Their chemistry, highly amusing, ripples with Hollywood allusions.

As an equivalent to Beckett's famous "country road beside a tree" setting, designer Lisa Hancharek gives Vince and Edward an authentically bleak cinder-block chamber with a fan, cop lighting (designer: Scott Peters), a coat tree (that sprouts leaves later in the play), and a mirror that may or may not be two-way. Into this cell (or is it a sanctuary?) catapult, as per *Waiting For Godot's* Pozzo and Lucky, a couple of clowns from the "domestic terrorism unit," the truculent and speedy Rocko (James Hamilton, in the season's most preposterous wig) and his much put-upon "administrative assistant" Linus (Collin Doyle), who will don the season's second most preposterous wig later. He delivers a long, insane monologue stuffed with detritus from some surveillance procedure handbook.

Moss's first-rate cast delivers with non-stop comic invention and timing: cop squad brawls as the vaudeville of modern life, all cheery violence and pratfalls. You don't have to be a Beckett scholar, but a passing acquaintance does enhance the spectator sport.

As a way of capturing our post-9/11 world, where explosions happen without explanation and no one knows who the enemy is, cross-hatching Godot and cop buddy-pics is clever. I must admit, though, Act II got away from me, especially since Godot peters out as a viable mystery character, the link between the two sets of cops loses its grip, and the apocalypse trumps all other existential musing. Till later, though, *Alias Godot*, the first Taser comedy of the year, is a buzz.

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