

TheaterJones

"blahblah" by Dead White Zombies

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Drawing on the phantasmagorical à la *Rocky Horror*, the metaphorical à la *Alice in Wonderland*, and the horrible à la *Real Housewives*, writer/director Thomas Riccio combines and contrives a bitter brew of cultural recursiveness that condemns its own contrivances.

The title of this debut production for **Dead White Zombies**, co-presented by Project X: Theatre, speaks volumes about its own sangfroid overconfidence: **blahblah**. It puts the hip in hypocritical, but the production design has such fluid imagination, you'll forgive the flaws. Sort of like a teenager that you know will turn out all right.

Young lovers, Karl and Joyce, are out for a stroll. Things are tense in the relationship and Joyce wants to have a "talk." Luckily for Karl, a downpour forces them into a big strange house, but it's out of the frying pan and into the fire.

The first people they meet are the famed and thus single-named Simone and the perfectly puerile Marty. Simone's stumbling strung-out demeanor only reinforces Joyce's fascination. Marty conversely

is all crotch-grabbing adolescent aggravation for Karl. Escaping them leads him to Gustav, the master of the house. Gustav is all the excess of Simone but on the masculine continuum. Rounding out the house are Armand and Pia, the expected hangers-on of the famed and flamed out.

Riccio's script is full of poetic pronouncements without the strictures of poetry. Adrift without that discipline, they wash by in dreamlike tides. The cast does their best with the psycho-loco-gistic-expi-allo-trocious text, making a path amongst the metaphors and allegores and phantasmagores to end up with a pretty conventional break-up play. If a relationship could have a psychotic break, it would probably look like this.



Abel Flores Jr. and Lori McCarty play the dysfunctional duo, Karl and Joyce. Just creating a believable history would be a feat with this triple-meaning text, but they go further, successfully engaging in embarrassingly cute couple-play. Of all the Sturm-und-Dranging in this evening, it's the loss of that little honest connection that was most affecting when all is said and done.

Iknur Ozgur and Brad Hennigan are delightful as Simone and Gustav. Ozgur's Simone is a pitiful husk hallowed out by celebrity. Hennigan's Gustav engages so fully in his indulgences that he makes everything seem a perversion. Mardi Robinson plays the archetypal adolescent, Marty, with a sock in her pants and a chip on her shoulder. Her commitment can't be faulted but the cross-casting dealt her a losing hand. Raquel Lydia Leal is most successful as Coco, the stripping and tripping friend of Simone.



The star of the show, though, is Riccio's set combined with Justin Treece's lights. Ages of black box theater may come to an end with this production. Gone are the black drapes. Riccio's triumph is a set made of white translucent nylon curtains that allow Treece to change color at will. It's just a cyclorama with slits, but it's employed with such fluidity as to redraw the boundaries of low budget theater.

But at the end, the fantastical ends up familiar. Just as when you write out your dreams on paper, the metaphors ring with embarrassing clarity. As much as we all want to be original, Jung showed us to be more alike than not. Karl and Joyce's problems are the same as anyone's. Somehow it makes all the shots at society's cultural vacuum unnecessary. Before, they were hard to separate from the story—like the Tupperware retaining some previous meal's aroma. But their final breakup, with its haiku, allows us to see what really matters.