

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

What's in Luka's Room? Not Much

Sylvie · Wednesday, August 26th, 2015

What is the point of theatre?

Historically speaking, as a whole and in general, it is there to enlighten – stimulate a better understanding of our world and us. Over its evolution, it also has been there to lift us up, to point the way, to amuse and entertain. At its best, it has made particular and exceptional use of a kind of holistic poetry unique to the stage. At its most rarefied, it has done all of those things well and at once.

So as I was mulling the Rogue Machine's current offering of *Luka's Room*, a bottom feeder of a comedy by Rob Mersola, these thoughts came flooding in, because while *any* subject is worthy of a play, it's the handling of it that counts and this play does anything but lift you up. Does it entertain? On a scale of one to five, let's give it a two. For better or worse, it focuses on life's underbelly.

Luka (Nick Marini), a young *naïf* who is transferring from one college to another has come to live with his grandmother Franca (Joanna Lipari) in California, only to find that his uncle Nick (an energetic Alex Fernandez), recently out of jail, is living there too.

Nick is more fun than he is sinister. This petty crook doesn't seem to be doing anything in particular, yet comes up with enough money to shower his nephew with gifts for his room: among them, a computer and a flat screen TV and... well, whatever else, as Luka will discover.

Such bounty is enough to get uncle and nephew to strike up friendly relations. Nick, revealed to make at least some of his money selling pot, is useful in other ways, such as offering sex advice to the lovelorn Luka who has fallen hard for one of Nick's "clients," the very compliant Angie (Sarah Scott).



Sarah Scott surprises Nick Marini in *Luka's Room* at Rogue Machine.

And what about Grandma? Grandma is a shoehorned character, there to provide these guys with a place to stay and (mostly) a place to stage their shenanigans. She also provides contrast. Lipari gives this oddball role her best shot (a good one). Her character is on the slippery slope to Alzheimer's, which means that anything goes, so whenever she opens her mouth it is chiefly to shock. When she isn't uttering inappropriate, even crude things that make us wince but that barely register with the action on stage, she surprises us with blunt retorts.



Alex Fernandez and Joanna Lipari in *Luka's Room* at Rogue Machine.

As events escalate, many ugly truths emerge (the chaotic effects of Alzheimer's, of prostitution, of deception, of lawlessness, of greed, of emptiness). In time, hard choices have to be made — first by Luka and then, as it turns out, by his dad AJ (Vince Melocchi), Nick's brother, who can't turn away from multiple dollar signs when he sees them, no matter how ill-gotten. Once the wrong choice is made, morality tale told. End of play.

There is a certain element of surprise in this unpretty plot that provides a few salacious chuckles, but the piece does not rise to the rank of satire, which might have given it the right kind of hard-hitting heft. It runs too long for what it has to say and thrives on barely sketched-in characters. More disappointing, Mersola throws in some entirely extraneous and distasteful moments, seemingly in search of a way to tantalize that never materializes. Whatever else the ever-snooping Internet has revealed to us, sex is not much of a spectator sport, and watching good actors doing grungy stuff is just not enough reason to spend 90 minutes in their company. At least we're spared an intermission.

Attention has been paid to the staging. Production values are solid and the direction by Joshua Britton is smooth gets the job done smoothly. But there is so little to hang on to in this little concoction that it all ends up feeling like a whole lot of effort for pretty thin rewards.

What is the point of theatre? To excite? Oh, yes. And to enlighten. If you want to see *that*, try next door, where *A Permanent Image* has just been extended to September 7.

Top image: l-r, Alex Fernandez, Nick Marini and Vince Melocchi in Luka's Room.

Photos by John Perrin Flynn.

WHAT: *Luka's Room*

WHERE: Rogue Machine Theatre, 5041 West Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90019.

WHEN: Fridays & Saturdays, 8pm; Sundays 3pm. Ends September 20.

HOW: Tickets \$30-\$35 available at www.roguemachinetheatre.com or 1.855.585.5185.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, August 26th, 2015 at 9:26 pm and is filed under [Theatre](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can leave a response, or [trackback](#) from your own site.

