

"Lion's" frighteningly funny roar

by Dick Glick

Lion in the Streets
Project Y at D.C. Arts Center
 2438 18th St., N.W.
 Admission \$10-\$13.

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This brilliant production of Canadian playwright Judith Thompson's flawed but darkly hilarious play, *Lion in the Streets*, oughta make her too pleased to poop. D.C.'s latest fledgling production company, Project Y, has, on almost zero budget, given the play an energized, ass-kicking, wildly entertaining production.

The script's primary trouble is that it's not so much a full-length play as a series of skits. To correct this problem, nether-worldly street-urchin named Isobel (Deana Harris) was created to lead us through Thompson's misanthropic vision of modern times. With dirt on her face, and a thin, papery dress, she's an irritating Beckett-esque harbinger of bad news. But, what *Lion* lacks as a whole is more than compensated for by the shining brilliance of its parts.

In one scene, a daycare provider is confronted by a group of (mostly) angry parents. God forbid, she's been using sweets to reward the children in her care. Lindsay Allen is a bird-like beast as the group's snotty chair-mom. Displaying a graphic depiction of Skittles and Starburst orbiting a deformed preemie, she warns, "It's a small step from sugar addiction to crack baby!"

My favorite scene featured a goodie two-shoes newspaper reporter (Christina Anderson) assigned to pen a heartwarming day-in-the life story about a woman with cerebral palsy (Sarah Bragin). When the woman turns out to be, let's say, less than heartwarming, the interview takes an ugly turn. After quenching her frustration by kicking the shit out of her subject, she intones, "You're okay...Your mother or a volunteer will be by."

Director Michole Biancosino wisely diverts attention from the Isobel problem, and focuses it squarely on the actors. *Lion's* ensemble cast is, without exception, a majestic display of talented up-and-comings. Each gets a moment to shine, as they frantically juggle a diverse crew of characters. They are brash and subtle, terrifying and endearing, sexy and



Lion in the Streets at DCAC.

smug, and best of all; fearless. Particularly so when *Lion* gets violent; quite an accomplishment considering the cramped intimacy of DCAC's tiny performance space. Remember the scene in *Gummo* where two inbred brothers slug it out? This show features its own full-on slap that connects with the same shocking force.

And isn't that what great art should do? Allow us to safely feel and explore emotions we normally avoid? No? Well, then, you'd better skip *Lion in the Streets*, because that's precisely what it does.

