

Theater Review: Sharp ‘References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 3, 2014 - 10:15am

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CHICAGO – In “References to Salvador Dali Makes Me Hot,” now at the Den Theatre in Chicago through September 7th, the intersect of author José Rivera and the strong cast of actors make for a formidable partnership. Committed and passionate interpreters take both the soft and edgy parts of the narrative to task.



Play Rating: **3.5/5.0**

The Den Theatre hosts some exciting storefront stage companies, and the sublimely-named Something Incredibly Marvelous Happening tackles the oftentimes airy script with energy and verve. Led by Allyce Torres and Christian Castro, the cast provides invention in metaphor and reality. The character portrayed by Torres is haunted by her fantasy life, which becomes more focused as she gains outside education. Castro is the brutish American soldier, home to a situation that he is not comprehending, and the lack of communication between the couple becomes the looming desperation.



Benito (Christian Castro) and Gabriela (Allyce Torres) in ‘References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot’

Photo credit: Anthony Alcardi for Something Incredibly Marvelous Happening

Gabriela (Torres) is the wife left at the homefront, while her soldier husband Benito (Castro) fights in Iraq. As she stares at the night sky, fueled with the knowledge from some college courses, the background characters of the night become alive. The Moon (Glenn Stanton) is a suave,

guitar-playing serenader. The Cat (Arti Ishak) makes whoopee with the Coyote (Luke Couzens). And through it all, the young neighbor boy Martin (Issac Arias) desires a playground of his own, mostly involving the lonely war wife.

The guts of the play are the major scenes with Gabriela and Benito, as they portray their marriage after the soldier's homecoming. These are brutal, as compared to those of the Moon, Cat and Coyote, and follows the dance of two people heading in different directions. Benito is direct and carnal, desiring the woman that he met when she was 15 years old. Gabriela is puzzled and angry, a head spinning with new found knowledge. In director Emmi Hilger's staging, their coupling seems like a violation rather than a marriage.

It is up to Castro and Torres to bring the couple to life, and they spar with a caustic but varied tone. Castro's Benito is raw and fierce, preferring a satisfaction in his animal instincts – in order to "conquer" the wife in question, rather than connect to her. Castro roots his performance in that darkness, and produces a soldier back from America's latest wars with the proper amount of tragic angst. Torres is more present during the hot confrontations between the two, rather than the quiet ones, but maintains a felicity in her dreams and a sorrow in her reality.



The Moon (Glenn Stanton) Serenades in 'References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot'

Photo credit: Anthony Alcardi for *Something Incredibly Marvelous Happening*

The more surreal supporting cast has fun playing with archetypes. Ishak's Cat and Couzen's Coyote are appropriately lush in their earthly desires, and cavort around the stage like, well, animals in heat. Glenn Stanton brings a perfect naturalistic tone to the Moon, and is a talented guitar virtuoso as well. His suave and sophisticated dance in Gabriela's fantasy is perfectly executed, and allows Torres a necessary break from all her onstage emotional weight. Issac Arias as Martin is an oily horn dog, and uses his performance compass to point back squarely towards his character.

The surrealist artist Salvador Dali definitely looms over Rivera's narrative, but there is a bit of shoehorning in the play to define the title (a character has to say it at some point). However, the strong cast is up to maintaining the landscape, and breathes a vitality into the souls of the real and imagined, important equations that add up to the whole result.

"References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot" is performed by Something Incredibly Marvelous Happening, and is presented at the Den Theatre, 1333 North Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago – Thursday-Saturday at 7:30pm, and Sunday at 3pm, through September 7th, 2014. [Click here](#) [18] for more information and to purchase tickets. Featuring Allyce Torres, Christian Castro, Glenn Stanton, Arti Ishak, Luke Couzens and Issac Arias. Written by José Rivera. Directed by Emmi Hilger.



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