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## Paradise Park



Why do we go to the theatre? The puppet master from Charles Mee's 2008 play says that "love is not just the ultimate escape but also the ultimate reality." And so "because theatre is the art form that deals above all others in human relationships, then theatre is the art... in which we discover what it is to be human and what is possible for humans to be."

That ultimate reality is the goal of "Paradise Park," a play by Charles L. Mee dealing with a quirky collection of people, circus performers, and animals reenacting the diversity of human relations. Frederique Michel's production of "Paradise Park" for the City Garage is a blend of loud, in-your-face expression of modern lifestyles and a poignant, demur description of human sympathy.

Human being's own split personality is given voice in the character of Mortimer/Charlie (David E. Frank), a man from one profile (Mortimer) and a woman from the other (Charlie). They switch off talking to one another from different profiles in one scene, in which Charlie calls Mortimer an empty suit and Mortimer counters by saying that he has a sensitive soul. Frank does an extraordinary job of coherently moving between the two, complete from changes in accent, voice tone, and personality. They seem to be the two sides of every man and woman, and each of them establishes the stereotypes of each other.

The party is interrupted by a pizza delivery man named Bob. He committed triple homicide of his family members based on some symbolic thing he read about in the New Testament. No one ordered a pizza, but of course, someone decided to pay for it.

Mee creates an alternative reality in this play, but Michel converts the seriousness into a display of far-sighted humor worthy of "The Seventh Seal." One moment, the circus folks dance around the park to the music of Fellini's "8 1/2." In another moment, ladies in bathing suits prat around complaining of their generic lives. A family of tourists, led by the dad (Bo Robert), the mom (Lena Kouyoumdjian), and the daughter (KC Wright) complain of their measly lives.

One of the great moments in the work comes from an anecdote. The gay count (Tim Orona), with whom the daughter is in love, describes the duchess of Devonshire as if she's the epitome of "cool." As an indictment of the shallow society the daughter is part of, she falls in love with the count as if she's in love the lifestyle of the duchess itself. Somehow, they never get it.

The music is daring, and so is the chicken walking onstage (as opposed to the cow). Mee's play is an absurdist nightmare that reveals much about contemporary society as it treats the world in a vacuum full of wonderful and bizarre characters. Michel's direction enhances that image.

"Paradise Park" is performed by City Garage (<http://www.citygarage.org/>) in Santa Monica, California, until of 7th of November, 2010.

