



Spilling Me Softly
 Photo: Brave New Workshop

Review: Brave New Workshop strikes satiric oil with Spilling Me Softly

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By **Brad Richason**, Twin Cities Performance Art Examiner

Don't be misled by the title of the [Brave New Workshop's](#) latest comedy revue.

Spilling Me Softly; or Once the Gulf Goes Black, It Never Goes Back is only tangentially connected to the Gulf Coast oil spill. While the disaster clearly informs the work, the collective sketches go beneath the surface of the catastrophe, drilling for humor in the dysfunctional stratum of contemporary politics. The inherent absurdity of ***Spilling Me Softly's*** source material, delivered via Brave New Workshop's reliably insightful satire, provokes enough laughter to persuasively argue that if these crises don't drive us irrevocably mad, society might still have a fighting chance.



In a clever narrative twist that parodies this summer's blockbuster film ***Inception***, the sketches of ***Spilling Me Softly*** are interwoven as layers of the consciousness. While gloriously ridiculous in its own right, the metaphysical conundrum serves a greater purpose. By seamlessly linking each sketch, the satiric targets are transformed into recurrent elements of irrational farce, suggesting the interconnected nature of social malaise.

Josh Eakright plays the unwitting dupe thrown into this comedic wormhole as a result of an ill-advised attempt to portray a version of himself portraying an illegal Mexican immigrant named El Guapo. The consequential identity crisis propels El Guapo through the sketches, a wandering figure unaware of his own fictitious nature. Eakright's skillful performance cleverly sidesteps any dangers of stereotyping by making it clear from the start that he is, in fact, ridiculing a stereotype, from the poncho and sombrero attire to the linguistic skills of a slightly below average high school Spanish student. The inspired bizarreness provides many of the show's highlights, including a sublimely lascivious tribute to the "sexy ladies of the U.S. Supreme Court."

Despite his deft performance, however, the rest of the cast are too good to let Eakright steal the show. Mike Fotis especially commands attention with two memorable roles. In the first his unkempt Ben Franklin reminds audiences of the importance of making uninformed decisions in the Midterm elections. In the

second his even more unkempt “eco-warrior” goes beyond annoying co-workers with his righteous body odor into actually jeopardizing their lives with his adoption of an unhinged and gigantic pelican. Both roles provide Fotis with ample opportunity to imbue patently absurd speeches with ludicrous conviction, making comic art out of clinical delusion.

Other standout performances include Ellie Hino as Minnesota’s most notorious congresswoman, Michelle Bachmann. This isn’t the first time Hino has satirized Bachmann but it may be the most hysterical, portraying the figure as an unbalanced mix of willful ignorance and megalomaniac proselytizing – even when engaged in such a seemingly innocuous activity as an eye exam.

Republican gubernatorial hopeful Tom Emmer also gets a hilarious skewering courtesy of Bobby Gardner. Depicting the candidate as the sorrowful victim of restaurant wait staff wrath following his notoriously bungled tip proposals, Gardner launches into a mournful ballad lamenting being so pitifully down in the polls that even Mark Dayton looks to be a formidable challenge.

The two remaining cast members, Lauren Anderson and Joe Bozic, might get less spotlight this time around, but both performers turn in solid supporting roles. Most memorably, Lauren Anderson brings an “extreme” mania to a Tea Party meeting at an area Perkins while Joe Bozic leads the desperate charge to restore Josh Eakright from the mental grip of El Guapo.

Artistic director Caleb McEwen keeps the material moving at a breathless pace, transitioning from one sketch to the next with fluid segues. And while the overall quality of the material isn’t as consistently strong as some past productions, the cohesive narrative keeps the swiftly moving show from ever dragging.

Spilling Me Softly; or Once the Gulf Goes Black, It Never Goes Back reasserts the Brave New Workshop’s deserved reputation for deriving humor from the mire of social pollution. Finding comedy in calamity might be dirty work, but the Brave New Workshop once again proves worthy of the task.

Spilling Me Softly; or Once the Gulf Goes Black, It Never Goes Back runs through October 30th.

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