

Review: Simian Showcase (Monkeyman Productions)

by Dorianne Emmerton



[Monkeyman Productions](#) and their [Simian Showcase](#) are doing important work. It's very silly work, but that makes it no less important.

Theatre is often seen as an elite art form. It's expensive and a lot of theatre produced is... old. Not to diss Shakespeare, he's great and all, but I've seen so much in my life that if I never see a Shakespeare show again that's fine by me. As long as I get to see new theatre, theatre set in our time and written for a contemporary audience; theatre that is about the world we live in, a world which includes – predominantly – the internet. You're reading this on the internet right now, aren't you?

The [Simian Showcase](#) was four short plays on “geek” themes. So the internet was featured, but so was such contemporary phenomena as LARPing and video games. In between the plays there was musical entertainment by the absolutely adorable duo of [Deborah Linden](#) and [Errol Elumir](#).

Deb and Errol sang songs such as “Geek Love Song” which is very informative as it teaches you how to say “I love you” in a variety of languages, such as Klingon, which “kind of sounds of threat” and Elvish, which is “yet another language that Tolkien made.” It even includes Binary.

The first play, *Chun Li*, is a pretty hilarious interchange between two video game geeks in a waiting room at an STD clinic. Justin is afraid he's caught something but Kyle is a little incredulous, since the two are roommates and Kyle knows Justin has been home every night for the last six months playing [World of Warcraft](#).

The title is a reference to an ass-kicking female character from the [Street Fighter](#) series of video games. I don't play video games myself – not because I'm opposed to them but because I have very poor hand-eye coordination – so I may not have found it as entertaining as gamers, but I was still pretty entertained. Underneath all the video-game oriented humour the story is a touching little testament to male friendship. (Yes, it's a bromance.)

The next play, *The Test*, takes place at one of those geek-oriented conventions where two former LARPing lovers run into each other. In case you don't know, LARP stands for Live Action Role Play and it's pretty much the geekiest thing on the planet. I may or may not have LARPed once or twice in high school. Don't judge.

Since you can't actually engage in physical violence when role playing it's a convention that when participants want to “test” each other they play Rock Paper Scissors; thus the title. Much like *Chun Li*, there's a lot of humour in a story that is ultimately heart-warming.

Double or Nothing is a steampunk story. Steampunk is a sub-genre of sci-fi that anachronistically places fantastical technology in a Victorian setting. The premise is that a revolutionary newspaper editor is held prisoner but one of his staff has developed a robotic version of him that will continue his work. The editor, however, is not so keen on the idea of being replaced.

This piece didn't resonate as much, likely because it was a more dramatic show following three very humorous pieces (the two plays and the musical interlude.) It wasn't devoid of comedy by any means, but it had a more serious feel than what had come before. It was a very neat idea though, and I'd definitely be interested to see a longer play by playwright Rebecca Nesvet.

The final show was called *Howard* and it returned to lots of laughs. Howard is a scientist calmly working at his lab when he's visited by an unexpected visitor: himself from the future! Howard has invented time travel, but has missed out on the love of his life and he's come back in time to fix that. Hilarity ensues, with a third Howard appearing to make further modifications to how Howard conducts his life.

Like the first three shows, the main thrust of *Howard* is an affirmation of love. If I didn't already know it, this night of theatre would make me suspect that behind all their war games and over-sexualized female characters, geeks are actually a pretty sentimental bunch.

I started this review by talking about Shakespeare. [Monkeyman Production's](#) press release says they are "...postmodern theatre with real relevancy to a culture informed by comic books, monster movies, and video games. We speak in the language of an audience that has most truly found its voice in the meme-ridden YouTube-obsessed depths of the Internet. We draw from popular culture in the way that Shakespeare drew from the common culture of his day – these are our mythologies, our tales of comedy and tragedy."

It takes some major cahones to compare yourself to Shakespeare, and four short plays with musical interludes is hardly a *Hamlet* or a *Midsummer's Night's Dream*. But given the glut of classic plays in the theatre scene and the lack of contemporary theatre with any relevance to the way we live our daily lives, I can't call the comparison apt but I also can't say I disagree.

Details

- Simian Showcase is playing at The "Back Of Ye Pub" at The Imperial Pub, 54 Dundas St. E. until April 16th.
- Evening shows at 8pm on April 8th, 9th, 15th, and 16th; Matinée at 2pm on April 10th; Late-night show at 11pm on April 16th
- Tickets are \$10, available at the door or via the [tickets page](#).

Photo of Michael Mackinnon and Brandon Hackett.

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