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## Unusual setting; Temporary theater continues Torn Space role as urban pioneer

By Colin Dabkowski

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One of the most compelling reasons to participate in the Buffalo Infringement Festival is the opportunity to explore strange and often ad hoc performance venues far from the beaten track. The philosophy of being an urban pioneer, of peeking your head into creaky old buildings that have long since outlived their original use, also happens to be a tenet of Buffalo's Torn Space Theater.

So it makes sense that the theater company, headquartered in the Adam Mickiewicz Library and Dramatic Circle on Fillmore Avenue, has put together its own Infringement production. A new adaptation of Russian playwright Leonid Andreyev's "He Who Gets Slapped," directed by Megan Callahan, opened July 27 in an old warehouse at 298 Northampton St., the former headquarters of Buffalo ReUse and future home of a shared artisan workspace run by the new organization Net Positive.

The building, which once housed rows of century-old doors and boxes of cabinet handles, door-knockers and other assorted materials salvaged from the city's historic homes, was adapted into a temporary theater for this production. Church pews make up the seats, and the set is at least partially constructed from materials left behind after ReUse moved to new digs.

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The one-act piece tells the sad tale of a writer-turned-clown (Chris Corporandy), whom we meet just after a stroke of bad luck has driven him to join the circus. We watch him fall in quite comfortably with a group of rough-and-tumble circus performers and fall in love -- quite uncomfortably, as it turns out -- with Consuela, a nimble young "bareback tango queen," played by Bonnie Jean Taylor.

The production is highly stylized, an approach theatergoers have come to expect from Torn Space. Dramatic lighting and sound shifts sometimes interrupt the action or dialogue and nudge both audiences and performers into a sort of dream state of heightened awareness. This almost always works to the advantage of this play, which, even in this wise new adaptation, is not what you would call fully fleshed out.

Corporandy's performance is a case study in the subtle creep of madness, a process that seems to be accelerated by the application of makeup and consummated by Consuelo's rejection of his crazed love. You get the idea that if his character -- known in the play only as He Who Gets Slapped -- had taken a slightly different course, he might have actually become the Joker, circa Heath Ledger.

Fine performances also come from Jon Elston, Bob Bozek and Jennifer Fitzery as a trio of clowns and Gerry Maher as Consuela's unscrupulous father, who thinks nothing of sacrificing his daughter's happiness for financial gain.

As Infringement fare goes, "He Who Gets Slapped" is more confident and polished than most offerings. That, and the opportunity to explore an exciting (if only ad-hoc) new performance space, are the only excuses you should need to catch the show in one of its two final performances.

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"He Who Gets Slapped"

3 stars (out of 4)

WHEN: Through Sunday

WHERE: The Foundry, 298 Northampton St.

TICKETS: \$10

INFO: 812-5733 or **www.tornspacetheater.com**