

Time Out

Chicago

Theater

Reviews

Tracks

★★★★★

TUTA at the Viaduct (see Fringe & storefront). By Milena Markovic. Dir. Zeljko Djukich. With ensemble cast.

We tend to screw theater artists with limited means when we compare them to artists who play with blank checks, and vice versa. Not that this stops us from doing so. Yet while it's ostensibly unfair to compare TUTA's modest, wrenching, new storefront production of the Balkan War—set *Tracks* to the Goodman Theatre's current leviathan *King Lear*, which frames Shakespeare's tragedy in the same conflict, it's virtually impossible not to. Both pointedly paint Milosevic-era Eastern Europe as a cultural wasteland and bloody, decimating minefield. But while *Lear*'s vastly cinematic look at the conflict is enormously entertaining, the production's vamped-up satire of Eurotrash is easy to dismiss. TUTA's American premiere instead leaves a mark by portraying punks with a taste for cheap American culture—that is, folks Americans identify as Eurotrash—as actual people. And even though *Tracks* is

simply a loose set of scenes strung together with (killer live performances of) early American rock & roll, its ruthless observation of youth during wartime will make you sober as a judge.

Examining a handful of ghetto youths before, during and after war invades their countryside, playwright Markovic grimly reveals what happens when a nation without a military-industrial complex engages in battle; there's no robust economy to cushion its returning soldiers. With a sparse visual vocabulary of slate-gray corridors and peekaboo blocking, director Djukich has staged a frightening, intermissionless piece of theater, one smart enough to use comfy angst-pop to keep us off-guard. His cast of mostly relative newcomers—all excellent—play the Balkans' lost generation, whose adolescence ended as the wars began, even better than TUTA's previous fine effort in the similarly themed *Huddersfield*. In particular, protagonist soldier Keith D. Gallagher captures the show's essence: He's so magnetic you can't take your eyes off him, yet such a wreck that it hurts just to look.—*Christopher Piatt*

Theater