

Call it charming or strange, TUTA Chicago cabaret is the real deal



By **Chris Jones**

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Plenty of cabarets claim eclecticism. But I submit that "Fulton Street Sessions," a little cabaret very much in the more eclectic Eastern European tradition of the word, is the only show on the planet where the song set ranges from "I Just Called to Say I Love You" to "Nearer My God to Thee" to "Black Betty," replete with an especially notable "bam-ba-lam."

This show, by the venerable and reliably intriguing experimenters who call themselves TUTA Theatre Chicago, is also the only cabaret in town where the lighting of choice in one section is not soft lamps but harsh fluorescent. Where the set is made of doors set in cold gray walls and the percussion is off in the wings. Where the talkback session takes place in the middle of the performance. And where the evening begins not with the gentle strum of strings nor the smile of a chanteuse, but the appearance of a bunch of women in parkas. Carrying trash bags.

Before long, we have a naked man in a bathtub being drenched with water. At another point, a woman

the house needs fixing.

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collection of sketches, songs and interludes reflecting current preoccupations ranging from the international to the personal, is not for all tastes. But this director, Zeljko Djukic, has excellent aesthetic taste and even in the most free-wheeling venture (this is a company-created show), the actors with whom Djukic cares to work are very focused on delivering truthful performances, no matter how bizarre the truth on display. "Fulton Street Sessions" is a very quirky and inherently deconstructive show, but there are some moments here that tickled me so much, I found myself chortling away for much of the 85-minute running time. I don't want to reveal too much of the content, since the wild juxtapositions of style and material are what gives this show its charm. Suffice to say that Djukic can be trusted to let things get strange and intensely personal, and then pull them back before anything feels indulgent. To some degree, this is a cabaret for those who hate cabarets.

Certainly, the aims of "Fulton Street Sessions" are modest. And the eclecticism scratches surfaces rather than delves deep. But there is something said here about the absurdity of the human condition (a starting off point, the company tells us at one point, was the horrific snowstorm of roughly a year ago). Clearly, TUTA has tried to create a show organized around music in the broadest possible sense, and you find yourself going with the non-linear flow with ease.

Djukic doesn't do it alone. The cast of Kirk Anderson, Jaimelyn Gray, Stacie Beth Green, Trey Maclin and Jacqueline Stone are very decent singers, as well as physically free actors with delicious senses of humor. They send themselves up quite delightfully.

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When: Through March 25

Where: Chicago Dramatists, 1105 W. Chicago Ave.

Running time: 1 hour, 25 minutes

Tickets: \$30 at 800-838-3006 or tutato.com

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