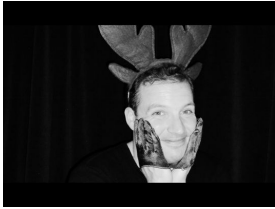


Lab Theater's 'Eight' is dark delight for holiday humbugs

Drew Dietsch, Special to The News-Press 11:06 a.m. EST December 17, 2015



(Photo: Special to The News-Press)

While other families gather around their TV sets this holiday season to watch the redemption of [Ebenezer Scrooge](#) or [Ralphie Parker](#) get his [Red Ryder BB gun](#), I'll be sharing a stiff drink with [Billy Bob Thornton's](#) alcoholic loser in *Bad Santa* and cackling maniacally with the mischievous monsters in "Gremlins."

I like my holiday chocolate dark, and Lab Theater's "The Eight: Reindeer [Monologues](#)" is the perfect treat for a sinful sweet tooth.

Set at the bar of the Red Nose Inn (ghoulishly adorned with the mounted skulls of fallen reindeer), the story involves Santa's illustrious eight reindeer sharing their opinions about a recent allegation that has been lobbed at [Kris Kringle](#). [Vixen](#) ([Dena Galyean](#)) claims that she was sexually assaulted by the jolly old elf, and this has brought a lot of the [North Pole's](#) sordid history into the spotlight.

Some of the reindeer stand by her and others don't. As the play's title implies, each member of the team gets to speak about his or her experiences and viewpoints on the recent controversy and on their lives as one of the eight most famous reindeer in the world.

Let's get this out of the way: This is a pitch-black comedy, so it's not the kind of show for the easily offended or the overly sensitive. There are crass jokes about genitalia, sexual orientation, pedophilia, promiscuity, chemical dependency, fatal injuries and pretty much any topic you can think of that isn't featured in "Miracle on 34th Street." If you're open-minded enough to find some of the most twisted scenarios imaginable to be hilarious, then you're the audience for this show.

Though the show's script by [Jeff Goode](#) is plenty humorous, it also doesn't shy away from exploring bleak ideas in a serious manner. For example, [Rudolph's](#) father, [Donner](#) ([James Robinson](#)), morosely opines about how his deformed son would never have had a chance at a normal life. It was genuinely surprising to find a lot of emotional weight in such a ribald show, but "The Eight: Reindeer Monologues" will leave you thinking as much as it does giggling.

That impact is heavily due to a near-perfect cast. It's almost impossible for me to pick a standout performance in such a uniformly enjoyable ensemble.

[Mike Dinko's](#) [Dasher](#) is a [Joe Pantoliano](#) character with hooves and antlers, and his gangster-like loyalty to Santa and Christmas starts the show off strong. [Matt DeNoncour's](#) flamboyant [Cupid](#) is a tad over-the-top. But when he stops going for scandalous jokes and gets serious, it's joyously uncomfortable and frightening.

[Dale Hoover's](#) [Hollywood](#) (that's the nickname the reindeer have given to [Prancer](#)) is an egotistical wannabe actor. And though his monologue features some dated references to [Abe Vigoda](#) and video rentals, his self-serious demeanor had me smiling.

[Kathy Grey's](#) [Blitzen](#) is a fantastic lush, going off on everyone and everything to do with Saint Nick's once-a-year gift-giving enterprise. [Patrick Day's](#) [Comet](#) is portrayed as an old biker and is probably the weakest of the group, but his regressive politics and blind devotion to Santa make for some of the best post-show conversation topics.

[Kate Dirrigl's](#) [Dancer](#) is the sweet but somewhat dim bulb of the pack, and she ends up possibly the saddest character of them all. [James Robinson's](#) [Donner](#) is pathetic and even a little loathsome, but he certainly makes his point of view known and does so admirably.

Finally, there's [Dena Galyean's](#) [Vixen](#), the center of this whole debacle. Strong and sensual, [Galyean](#) has to handle the darkest chunk of the show and sells it like gangbusters.

I can't recommend "The Eight: Reindeer Monologues" highly enough, but I know that it's not going to be everyone's cup of eggnog. It's transgressive, offensive, crude and unafraid to examine some of the darkest corners of the [Christmas spirit](#).

For naughty kids like me, this is the best present a theatergoer could ask for.

If you go

- **What:** "The Eight: Reindeer Monologues"

• **When:** Now through Sunday. Performances are 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday with two 2 p.m. matinees Saturday and Sunday.

• **Where:** The Laboratory Theater of Florida, 1634 Woodford Ave., [Fort Myers](#)

• **Tickets:** \$25 for adults and \$12 and for students at the door. \$20 Thursday night performance pricing to [Seniors](#) and [Military](#).

• **Info:** 239.218.0481 or laboratorytheaterflorida.com (<http://laboratorytheaterflorida.com>)

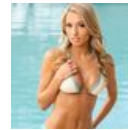
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