

← Back to Original Article

## STAGE REVIEW : Exorcising Demons : AIDS Is Subtext in 'Bogeyman,' a Reza Abdoh Shocker at LATC

August 30, 1991 | SYLVIE DRAKE | TIMES THEATER CRITIC

There was a time when Reza Abdoh was into activism. Even lyricism (remember "Rusty Sat on a Hill One Dawn and Watched the Moon Go Down"?). But the balance started to shift last year with "The Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice." A stridency pierced the work like a knife. Now the mood has tilted--plunged or soared, depending on the point of view.

"Bogeyman," Abdoh's latest creation at the Los Angeles Theatre Center, is a raucous, angry exorcism of relationships and assorted fears, shadowed by the Big One: the plague of AIDS.

That presence is pervasive in a piece that epitomizes LATC's mission: to mount strong, uninhibited theater, unafraid to take on dangerous themes in baldly political ways. (Like Abdoh, flailing at his own demons in "Bogeyman," the financially strapped theater is still struggling to resolve its own uncertain future.)

AIDS is the whirling dervish that drives the wildness of "Bogeyman's" imagery--the dead or dying bodies, the grotesqueries, the blood, the sex, the sadomasochism. From the moment the lights come up on an androgynous body lying nearly naked on the ground in front of designer Timian Alsaker's re-creation of a 1920s three-story apartment building, the pace is frantic, the pitch hysterical, manic, absurdist, nihilistic.

For Abdoh, there is an arc here, if not a plot. The program divides "Bogeyman" into a prologue, five acts and an epilogue, with subheads that identify scenes. But tracking them as you watch, or making correlations, is another matter. It may say "Bugle Boy Off to Hospital" or "A Family Day" or "Hilda Drops Bomb Into Board Room" but you won't necessarily know it from the peripatetic goings-on in 14 playing areas.

There are defined characters: A father (Tom Fitzpatrick); a mother who is to some also a stepmother (Juliana Francis); three sons (C. Gerod Harris, Peter Jacobs, Ken Roht); their grandma (physically impaired Sandie Crisp, who becomes an attractive flaxen-haired godmother on occasion), and a motley assortment of other players known by such literal names as the Boy With Green Hair (Cliff Diller, who also has rings in the most unanticipated places) or the Fifth Savior (Anthony Torn).

Fifth after whom? Don't ask. Logic is not the point. Better to sit back and let "Bogeyman" flow over you. Like brackish effluvium. Abdoh's witches' brew rejects analysis. It's designed to shock and wants to be absorbed by osmosis, through the pores, the eyes, the ears and no doubt other parts of the anatomy. Within those stipulations, the rules of the game slacken considerably. The only issues are issues of effectiveness.

Is this a bogus "Bogeyman" or a real one? Real. Abdoh has amply demonstrated an established talent in positive and negative ways. If that talent is guilty of anything, it is overabundance. Does it help to make this such a particularized leather-and-chains and spiky hair world? Only if the intent is not only to shock but willfully intimidate. The fears are real. The angers are real. And the invocation of shock is a young man's palpable rage at the threatened dying of the light.

"Bogeyman" is De Sade and Hieronymous Bosch meet the Frog Prince and American popular song in a massive effort to knock the wind out of a complacent society.

For the first time in Abdoh's work, a note of desperation has crept into the revolution. The assault is more blunt and more bludgeoning. The railing more bitter. The senses reel from noise, simultaneous action, cross-dressing, general weirdness and a concerted effort to make the characters on stage look as if they'd come from Mars, before we actually get there in a humorous and almost lyrical scene near the end known as "A Family Picnic on Mars."

It's not quite the picnic you'd expect. The benevolent strains of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" in "Bogeyman" can dull expectation, and Abdoh's densely packed rebellion is quick to politicize everything, but don't be deceived.

It may not seem like it as you watch this by turns numbing and dazzling parade of raunchiness and violence and provocation in a topsy-turvy world. (Note the upside-down hospital room, third floor, stage left; note the line of frontally nude males blithely singing and dancing.) But "Bogeyman" is not the statement of a traditional *enfant terrible* so much as the anguished cry of a modern-day Peter Pan.

When all is spewed and done, "Bogeyman" is the diatribe of the little-boy-lost in Abdoh who is secretly yearning for the chance he may not get to grow up.

*"Bogeyman," Los Angeles Theatre Center, 514 S. Spring St., Los Angeles. Tuesdays-Sundays, 8 p.m.; Saturdays-Sundays, 2 p.m. Ends Oct. 13. \$23-\$28; (213) 627-5599. Running time: 1 hour, 30 minutes.*

'Bogeyman'

Carl Burkley: A Wounded Bird.

Sandie Crisp: Grandma/Fairy Godmother

Cliff Diller: Boy With Green Hair

Tom Fitzpatrick: The Father

Juliana Francis: Mother/Stepmother/Nurse

C. Gerod Harris: Son, Blake

Peter Jacobs: Son, Billy

Ken Roht: Son, Bugle Boy/Lorna

Tom Pearl: Blake's Lover/Hilda

Steffan Santoro: Starlet

Anthony Torn: The Fifth Savior/A Serial Killer

Created and directed by Reza Abdoh. Producer Diane White. Sets Timian Alsaker. Lights Rand Ryan. Costumes Marianna Elliott. Sound Raul Vincent Enriquez, W. Galen Wade. Cellist Michael Black. Video Adam Soch. Choreography Ken Roht. Hair and makeup Elena Maluchin Breckenridge. Assistant director Alyson Campbell. Stage manager Elsbeth M. Collins.

---

**Los Angeles Times** Copyright 2017 Los Angeles Times

[Index by Keyword](#) | [Index by Date](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)