

Theatre Ghost

WHEN LOVE'S OUT OF TIME – “ONLY THE MOON HOWLS”

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Many an internet meme exhorts us to tell the people we love that we love them, to do the little things that help keep love alive. And a play currently enjoying a second successful run in Eagle Rock examines in detail *How Love Lasts* [see my review, below].

Theatre Unleashed, in North Hollywood, is taking a darker look. They're re-staging *Only the Moon Howls* (originated by Boys With Dogs Theatricals at last summer's Hollywood Fringe Festival).

This tight, spare drama by Dean Farel Bruggeman looks at how love *doesn't* last.



Kate Dyer, Michael Lutheran

It has three characters – an unlikely couple who meet and find their way into marriage, and time. Throughout the play, so quietly you may not even notice it, a clock ticks, laying the ground-bass. Onstage, four shades set each new scene and remind the characters what is to happen, and that

there isn't much time.

The scenes are moments in their relationship. From their meeting in a coffee shop, she drives, he rides; she climbs the corporate ladder, he sells a few short stories. They decide not to have children. She is always arguing with the guiding shades, wanting to tell the story her way, but losing. He observes that they have all the time in the world.

But they don't. They have only the years time gives them. As those fly by, it becomes painfully clear these two aren't cultivating their intimacy, aren't planting the little flowers – nor turning the earth with deeper conversations. As the time shortens, they both become anxious, try to bargain; then it ends.

What's left is questioning: “Was it worth it?” “Did they dig deep enough to find at least some of the treasure?” Questioning, and regret.

This is not an easy tale to watch. Anyone who has tried to love knows these failures, these shortcomings. The Biblical term translated as “sin” actually means a more human “falling short,” and this play feels like a medieval morality play, in which humans find their arms too short to wrestle with God. Or a Greek tragedy, where we are overwhelmed by the Fates.

The Unleashed company tells this tale as it must be told. They cause us to feel connection, and pain. Every element cooperates, almost invisibly: director/designer Eric Cire's nearly naked stage, with the wall ripped off the scene shop; Gregory Crafts' swift, precise lighting; Aaron Lyons' evocative sound design; Brandie June's spot-on costumes.

And of course, the actors. Kate Dyer creates a Whitney whose acid tongue and untiring ambition fail to mask her uncertainties, making us feel with her across a distance. Michael Lutheran's Jake wins us quickly, but keeps nearly losing us with his passivity. And the brisk, no-nonsense Guides (led by Margaret Glaccum) keep us unsettled by pushing things forward to an end we, too, feel unready for.

(Note: This cast alternates with another, which I have not seen; but Theatre Unleashed's bench is so deep you will not be disappointed.)

Artistic director Jenn Scuderl Crafts and the team who selected *Only the Moon Howls* for a second production chose wisely. And Theatre Unleashed's artists do themselves proud, in as fine a modern love tragedy as you can hope to see.

Only the Moon Howls, by Dean Farrell Bruggeman, directed by Eric Cire.

Presented by Theatre Unleashed at the Belfry Stage, 11031 Camarillo St., North Hollywood 91602.

Mondays at 8:00,
Thursdays through Saturdays at 8:00,
through March 12.

Tickets: <www.theatreunleashed.org> or (818) 849-4039.