

## A Light, Screwball Satire on Fascism at the Brumder

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The cast of NOT DEAD YET at the Brumder Mansion.

I love a locally-written show. If Milwaukee's theatre scene is going to expand and evolve, it's really going to need to produce more original stuff. Even if it's not great, a locally-written show is *fresh*. Fresh goes a long way when it is far easier to go with something safe and established. This month, **Milwaukee Entertainment Group** stages a clever, deceptively light comedy with **Andrew Peterson's** *Not Dead Yet*. On the surface, it's a weird, screwball comedy that feels like a comfortable fusion between Mel Brooks and the Zucker Brothers. Weird jokes are packed around the edges of a comedy with clever, little pop cultural references and odd bits of visual humor cuddling in the margins of the action. On a deeper level, all of the weirdness is lovingly constructed around a rather sophisticated, little satirical look at fascism and the madness of megalomania. (So...y'know...very topical given the current political climate here in the US.) Directed by **Robert A. Zimmerman**, a small ensemble agilely weaves the right kind of comic fusion for a really satisfying screwball political satire.

**Dennis Lewis** is dramatically poised as Cameron James Pinchurst III--a film director who produced the top three highest-grossing films of all time including *The Abuse* and *Iceberg Shmiceberg*. He's clearly a spoof of legendary Hollywood egotist James Cameron. The script features clear references to Cameron's movies *The Abyss*, *Aliens* and probably quite a few more. The show starts on the main floor where everyone in the audience is handed an NDA with incredibly fine print which signs away all rights directly to the filmmaker. Lewis' comic poise as a Hollywood egotist serves as a central focal point for the entire comedy.

The presentation in the basement is intended to be a table reading of a new script for Pinchurst. In a

Russ Bickerstaff

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**Amber Regan** is suitably nihilistic as the hard-drinking Bernice Is-not-my-name. Ms. Is-not-my-name is a veteran/victim of an evidently long line of Pinchurst's previous productions.

**Zach Sharrock** plays the aggressively reluctant actor Adolf Ebola. Adolf gradually gets drawn-into the immense gravity of an inescapable project, invariably becoming every bit as dedicated to it as everyone else. Sharrock's is probably the closest to the heart of the satire. Ebola suffers from a weird mutation of Stockholm syndrome as he is forced to join the group and engage in cheerleading for fear of being forced into the punishment of yet *another* project with Pinchurst later-on. Everyone involved must participate or be punished...with contractually-obligated future projects. The NDAs that the audience signs suggest that everyone in the theatre is suffering from the same conditions at the hands of the mad James Cameron-like Hollywood egotist.

I *loved* **Brittany Curran** as the cheerful Susie Ditz--heir to the Ditz Cracker fortune. Peterson's script could easily make the character come across as some flat, comically stupid stereotype. To her credit, Curran gives Ditz many subtle layers of comic complexity. Ditz isn't stupid...she's just so completely lost in her own world that she doesn't totally connect-up with the world around her. Curran gives Ditz a lot of clever comic affectations that suggest a very deep character beyond the script. It's a really endearing performance.

**Chris Goode** stands at the helm of the production in the role of Pinchurst's assistant E. Orr Block. Goode's cheerful fidelity in the role is animated by a genuine concern for the wellbeing of his lord and master Pinchurst. The love at the heart of Goode's performance keeps the character from being the kind of weak character toadies and lackeys so often are.

One by one, various characters die-off...evidently at the hands of Pinchurst's obsessive jilted lover Ginger Katz. **Cara Johnston** vamps it up as the comically sexy femme fatale. Katz' psychotic kitty fursona is played for laughs. The human kitty jokes end up forming some of the weaker humor in the script, but Johnston does such a good job of selling it that it actually becomes funny. Johnston has great comic instincts which came to light opening night in her ancillary role as Adolf's girlfriend "Tweets." There was an evidently accidental incident involving bubble gum that would be *really* difficult to repeat. Johnston's smart comic instincts made it work. Some of the best stuff in a show like this can't be scripted. Johnston and Curran give this production some impressive life around the edges of a largely sharp satirical script.

Milwaukee Entertainment Group's *Not Dead Yet* runs through **June 22nd** at the **Brumder Mansion** on **3046 W. Wisconsin Ave.** For ticket reservations and more, visit [Milwaukee Entertainment Group online](#).

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