

Pleasantly Surreal Detective Spoofery (//thesmallstage.weebly.com/blog/september-08th-2018)

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The cast of JAKE REVOLVER: VCR REPAIRMAN at the Brumder Mansion.

Writer **Matthew Konkel** and Director **Tom Marks** bring a multi-tiered retro-spoof down to earth as **Milwaukee Entertainment Group** presents *Jake Revolver VCR Repairman*. The show has a cast of actors playing actors from a fictitious live radio show. A vibrant cast brimming with contrasting energies deliver a gumshoe detective spoof to the cozy subterranean space beneath the Brumder Mansion.

The hardboiled detective spoof has a long history. It might even go back as far as the authors who defined the genre in the '30s. One can feel the humor radiating out from the edges of the works of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. With this one, Konkel decides to be deliberately ambiguous with the era in a sci-fi mashup set in a hazily present era. **Phil Stepanski** is charming as detective-turned-VCR repairman Jake Revolver. In a clever duality, **Amy Geyser** plays a shy voice actress who transforms into a sultry femme fatale named Dearly Leading. Ms. Leading has hired Jake Revolver in a caper involving a fabled VCR that, according to legend, has mysterious powers over reality.

Aiding Revolver in his task is his brilliant and brilliantly quirky assistant Top Load played with dizzyingly effervescent cheeriness by **Hayley San Fillippo**. She's part of an eclectic supporting cast that includes a reasonably tall **Jason Nykiel** as a couple of very short characters, **Pam Scheferman** as a detective who is trailing Revolver and the distinctive voice of **Jim Donaldson** in a couple of different characters influencing Revolver from the corners of the script.

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Konkel's humor is a comically twisted torture of the prose styles of Hammett and Chandler. The comic surrealism of Konkel's dialogue threatens to overtake the comedy at nearly every turn. Sometimes the comedy is going so far in the direction of *The Weird* that it seems to misplace the comedy altogether. Even when it occasionally drifts away from outright comedy, *Jake Revolver VCR Repairman* is a pleasantly bizarre mutation of traditional spoofery that nearly transforms into its own kind of meta-comic adventure.

(So it's weird. And that's cool. Even when it's not funny.)

But there IS some really inspired comedy here. The best of it comes from **Laura Holterman** and **Marcus Beyer** as generic ad couple Ginger and Sage in a series of commercials for existentially scented candles. Beyer has the voice of a classic radio announcer. Holterman has the presence of the classic domestic woman found in so many mid-twentieth century TV and radio commercials. The two play a couple so lost in the effect of the product they're selling that they don't seem to notice how truly imbalanced they are psychologically. There's really deep satire going on with Ginger and Sage that takes up exactly the right amount of space in the larger program. Beyer and Holterman are comically magnetic. When not in character as Ginger and Sage, Holterman and Beyer are a couple of casually oblivious consumers. Early-on they can be seen in the background eating what appears to be an entire meal. Onstage. While the action is going on. It's difficult to express how weirdly cool that is.

The rest of the cast has a really friendly dynamic that's fun to watch. Geyeser can be seen in character reading a copy of *Smithsonian Magazine*. Others roam about at times checking out scented candles and rotating through various nonverbal exchanges. They've rendered a really complex, unspoken dynamic between them. Director/Sound Effects Guy Tom Marks has done a good job of bringing both layers of the narrative to the stage...only allowing them to conflict with each other when the script calls for things to tumble about between the actors, the actors they're playing and the characters *they're* playing. It all blends and blurs together in a very satisfyingly surreal trip to a performance space under a mansion on Wisconsin just outside of Marquette.

Milwaukee Entertainment Group's *Jake Revolver: VCR Repairman* runs through **Sep. 22nd** in the **Subterranean Theatre** at the **Brumder Mansion** on **3046 West Wisconsin Avenue**. For ticket reservations and more, visit Milwaukee Entertainment Group online (<http://milwaukeeentertainmentgroup.com/jake-revolver-vcr-repairman>).

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