



KILL ME LIKE YOU MEAN IT

Reviewed by Andy Propst · January 7, 2007



Absurdist theatre is often intentionally obscure, while mystery writing tries to clarify things. Kiran Rikhye blends the two in *Kill Me Like You Mean It*, an intriguing if not always satisfying work.

Rikhye, with director Jon Stancato, reveals the parallels between the two seemingly incongruous genres. The script is awash in clipped, often repetitive dialogue that sounds simultaneously like something out of a classic noir B-movie and an absurdist classic. Stancato, in order to replicate the steep camera angles of noir films, sometimes has the actors posture or sit in ways that evoke absurdist performance styles.

As clever as these two have been in creating this absurdist detective fiction, they have not been able to create a play that weds with complete satisfaction the mutually exclusive aspects of the two forms. It's a tribute to Rikhye's mystery writing that ultimately

we become fascinated by this whodunit, which begins with no-nonsense American private investigator Ben Farrell (Cameron J. Oro) being hired by Mona, a trumpet-playing chanteuse (Emily Otto, also composer of the show's atmospheric jazz underscoring). Before they can speak, however, she's gunned down.

Farrell's list of suspects includes Tommy Dickie, Mona's flighty, mystery-writing stepson (played, in an absurdist flourish, by Tommy Dickie), whose fiction anticipates this murder and presages others. Mona's stepdaughter (Liza Wade White), a sultry, spoiled heiress for whom Farrell develops romantic feelings, might also have fired the fatal shot, and even Tommy's hard-nosed publisher (Alexia Vernon) is a suspect. As Farrell sorts through their motives, he also searches for Tommy's missing wife, and Farrell's onetime police detective colleague (Sam Dingman) shows up to demand that he drop the investigation.

Under Stancato's shrewd direction, the actors ably perform in noir and absurdist styles, showing much promise in a play that generally amuses even as it challenges perceptions of the genres.