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Entertainment

THEATER REVIEW: Of all the parodies, go here

By TOM TITUS

Costa Mesa's American Coast Theater Company was born last summer with a memorable production of the classic drama "A Streetcar Named Desire." This year, the company has ventured as far from that genre as humanly possible.

With "Bullshot Crummond," written by committee and overflowing with slapstick and sight gags, the theater company demonstrates its artistic range. And if you think comedy is easier to produce than drama, then take a closer look at the production now occupying the Lyceum Theater stage at Vanguard University.

"Bullshot," which parodies the vintage detective movies of the 1930s (such as "Bulldog Drummond"), is a wild and crazy exercise that seems less a play than an elongated skit from the old "Carol Burnett Show." Its farcical melodramatic style is abetted by outlandish props and sound effects.

Susan K. Berkompas, who heads Vanguard's theater department and rendered a superb Blanche in last summer's "Streetcar," is a triple threat in "Bullshot." She not only directs and portrays a comic villainess, she also came up with the hilarious sound plot so essential to a production of this type.

Berkompas is the deliciously scheming femme fatale to James Whitson's evil German spy (this being the World War II period) and the pair complement each other splendidly, reveling in their comical dastardly doings. Whitson is particularly effective while playing both his own character and a hired Italian assassin in a series of quick changes.

In the title role of the peerless English detective, Rene Scheys brings all the smug self-assurance of a Maxwell Smart as he stalwartly battles the forces of evil. Scheys is impressively in tune with the play's farcical format, relishing his moments of triumph and keeping a perpetual stiff upper lip when the wickets get sticky.

As the damsel in distress (or whose father is in distress), Heaven Peabody is chirpily charming, asserting her independence even while falling for the self-absorbed Crummond. Don't bring any water glasses into the theater, as her shrieks surely will shatter them.

While Berkompas does the work of three people, Markus Parker accomplishes the tasks of seven — portraying a collection of assorted oddballs and capturing some of the play's funniest moments. This Vanguard graduate makes a welcome return in an exhausting array of characters.

Paul Eggington's spare unit setting works well for the production, particularly with its two revolving panels. Costume designers Lia M. Hansen and Cecie McClelland have created some beautifully outlandish outfits, while Erin Wendorf rates a big hand for her vast collection of comic properties.

Following "Bullshot Crummond," which closes Aug. 10, Gavin and Patti MacLeod will take the stage for a one-weekend production of "Love Letters" Aug. 22 to 24. Meanwhile, five comedic actors strut their stuff in "Bullshot Crummond." May the farce be with them.

WHAT: "Bullshot Crummond"

WHO: American Coast Theater Company.

WHERE: Vanguard University, 55 Fair Drive, Costa Mesa

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays until Aug. 10

COST: \$20-\$25

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