

West Side Show Room has another winner in 'Milk Milk Lemonade'

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Mindy Joy

West Side Show Room's 2014 production of 'Milk Milk Lemonade'

Rating: ★★★★★

March has been a good month for local theatre. Artists' Ensemble is currently putting on a good show (the [review](#) of which [you can read here](#)), and across town at [West Side Show Room](#), another great show is currently playing. Continuing through this Saturday, this new theatre company is presenting *Milk Milk Lemonade*, a humorous yet touching, completely over

the top comedy by Joshua Conkel.

West Side Show Room made quite an entrance with their performance of *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom* ([more on that here](#)), but the inherent trouble with such an entrance is the dilemma of following it up with something just as good. That is no issue here, and in fact, *Milk Milk Lemonade* not only meets, but exceeds the standard set. In nearly every way, this show is a step up from what was already an excellent achievement.

The evening actually starts with another of Conkel's works, *Up With (Some) People*, a short but amusing take on, of all things, the rapture. Genny Bonavia and Raymond Fanara play exaggerated country club types, and get quite a few well-deserved laughs.

The meat of the performance is, of course, *Milk Milk Lemonade*. The cast is very strong. Playing main character Emory is Andrew Harth. His performance is perfect. Harth has a pervasive, charming sweetness (but portrays a range of emotions well) and projects the character's age effectively without making it overly parodied. Emory's best friend is an anthropomorphic chicken named Linda, played hilariously by Mike Werckle, who uses his body language and mannerisms to great comedic effect. Werckle doesn't get many lines outside of clucks, but manages to make those sounds expressive, and his actions go just as far in making the character entertaining as his ridiculous pink feathered getup does. Rosemary Million plays Nanna, Emory's gruff and decrepit guardian. The way she almost oozes across the stage is great, and her performance adds a layer of genuine care for Emory in the character's own fashion beneath the rebukes. Playing bully and fire enthusiast Elliot is Colton Thompson. The character is interesting, evolving from a one-note antagonist into something more complex in his relationship with Emory. Thompson does a good job, but could vary his delivery a tad more. Finally, we have Carolyn Cadigan as the nameless Lady in a Leotard. She moves the story forward as narrator, and plays a number of small parts that she keeps distinct, including a Gollum-esque performance as a parasitic twin, a spider that antagonizes Linda, and a fantasy musical number as Emory's doll come to life. Good performances all around.

The design of *Milk Milk Lemonade* is a step up from the previous show as well, while still maintaining the charming shabbiness of that production. Set decorator Julie Seger presents a farm landscape in silhouettes of yellow and pink, evoked by the title. Later in the show, there is a rather clever "chicken processor" that makes use of a few special effects. Genny Bonavia's costumes are also well done, with the obvious highlight being Linda the chicken. Also, who knew you could effectively costume a spider with no more than a hat? Clever work, indeed.

Vampire Lesbians was fun, but this show (beneath the chicken-drag, abundance of not-so-subtle imagery, and sheer ridiculousness) has an undeniable touching aspect as well. Emory's

need to express his individuality and uniqueness while others try to conform or correct him is something many can relate to. There's even a small performance within the performance, a rather touching exchange between a husband and wife when Emory and Elliot decide to play "house." The ending scene is also unexpectedly poignant. These moments elevate this production from only being entertaining, to being something special.

In the previous review of *Vampire Lesbians*, the comment was made that the audience for the show seemed rather standard (though not negatively so). For this performance, there were actually many younger patrons, which can only be a good thing. Many local companies have been courting this elusive slice of the populace, and perhaps West Side Show Room has found the working solution.

Chatting with director and founder Mike Werckle after the show, he made the comment that "We're not better, we're just different." Here though, different is very, very good. Tickets for *Milk Milk Lemonade* can be purchased [through their website](#) (or at the door). You've got one more weekend to see this different but quite excellent show, so get to clicking.



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