

New Works Festival spotlights student-run theatre

THEATRE PREVIEW

New Works Festival

WHEN Tuesday, Feb. 5 - Sunday, Feb. 10
WHERE Timms Centre for the Arts (87 Avenue and 112 Street)
HOW MUCH \$10 at the door

Kate Black
 ARTS & CULTURE STAFF • @BLAHLAHLAHLA

Stepping out of your comfort zone — and working hard while you do it — characterizes the development of the U of A Department of Drama's New Works Festival. Throw this in with balancing a full course load and you may end up with an experience that artistic director and fourth-year Drama major Bevin Dooley describes as filled with "lots of drinking and lots of tears" — something most university students can relate to.

Entering its 13th season of operation, the New Works festival continues to keep things fresh by exclusively featuring six original, unproduced works. The completely student-run festival captures the essence of university life by pushing both boundaries and time schedules — and as GRA Consultant Mia van Leeuwen explains, it's all in the spirit of fostering artistic growth.

"Our main goal is to facilitate the development of work by emerging playwrights, so we try to provide development opportunities to new emerging writers who might not be able to get them through a different company. We consider ourselves, a lot

of the time, to be a stepping stone to other projects or festivals," van Leeuwen says.

Dooley explains these development opportunities couldn't be done without an arsenal of collective volunteer work done out of "a labour of love."

"Sometimes we have friends, siblings or significant others that we'll 'volun-tell' to do things, but for the most part, everyone on the executive and all of the writers, directors, dramaturges, actors and designers pitch in some way other than in the scope of their field," says Dooley.

"I'll be painting," adds van Leeuwen.

"And I showed up for a lighting hang today!" Dooley laughs.

"Our main goal is to facilitate the development of work by emerging playwrights, so we try to provide development opportunities to new emerging writers who might not be able to get them through a different company."

MIA VAN LEEUWEN
 GRA CONSULTANT, NEW WORKS FESTIVAL

In addition to a volunteer force of U of A students, the festival also incorporates a mentorship aspect. Artistic director and dramaturge at Theatre Yes Heather Inglis, U of A Playwright in Residence Greg MacArthur and

local director Trevor Schmidt — a triad Dooley describes as "The Holy Trinity" — worked with and mentored the festival's participants throughout their preparation.

However, as MFA Directing candidate and festival participant Simon Bloom explains, the most learning and personal growth comes from stepping outside your field of practice.

"It's completely student-run, so it's a learning experience for a lot of people. So that's something that we always have to keep in mind. It might be someone's first time hanging lights," says Bloom, who directs festival play *The Tragedy of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl*.

Bloom's play offers a feminist response to the character trope of the "Manic Pixie Dream Girl" found in films such as *500 Days of Summer* and *Garden State*, where the spontaneous, impulsive female lead brings the male out of the monotony of his own life. Written, directed and performed by a crew of 20-somethings, Bloom explains that this play, along with the other shows in the festival, are geared towards the university crowd.

Although Bloom admits it's sometimes difficult to work on a smaller-scale set with a more intimate group of people, he's confident that the challenge is rewarding, and ultimately contributes to the learning experience of student-run theatre. As a 15-year veteran of theatre, van Leeuwen says that in the end, it's all part of the game.

"I think within theatre, there's this initiation process that you go through — not that I'm advocating for how that should always be or anything ... but it's all part of the process."



SUPPLIED

the brews brothers

WRITTEN BY Adrian Lahola-Chomiak and Ben Bourrie

Porter

Brewery: Mikkeller
Available at: Sherbrooke Liquor Store (11819 St. Albert Trail)

Like many beer enthusiasts out there, I have my favourite breweries I always return to when I find myself plagued with indecision in the aisles of the liquor store. One of those standbys is Mikkeller, an unconventional brewery that consistently cranks out some of the best beers in the world. This week, I checked if my inner fanboy was justified by trying out Mikkeller Porter.

The beer pours a syrupy dark brown with about a finger and a half of rich brown head, which lingered for a significant time. On the nose, there's a syrupy liquorice and bitter chocolate aroma that fades into roasted nut and coffee notes. Porter is pleasant, but it's a bit more subdued than I would've expected — even at room temperature.

Flavour-wise, the beer doesn't hold back, opening up with a strong roasted bitter malt and somewhat herbal hop flavours.

As those fade, interesting liquorice and dark fruit notes come up with a faintly acidic, espresso-like background, which leaves a lingering bitterness. The mouth feel is a bit thin, but the low carbonation helps it feel substantial.

Mikkeller Porter plays with some interesting flavours for the style, which is pretty much what I expected. Luckily, it also pulls it off well and makes for a good beer. I give it an 8.5/10 and recommend this to anyone who loves dark beers.



Plaid Dragon

Brewery: Alley Kat
Available at: Sherbrooke Liquor store (11819 St. Albert Trail), Alley Kat Brewery (9929 60 Ave.) and Keg n Cork (3845 99 St.)

Having just released the next instalment in their Dragon series of Imperial IPAs, Alley Kat continues to bring new offers to the table on a monthly basis. The aptly-named Plaid Dragon makes use of multiple hop varieties — which have all been used in past editions of the Dragon series — but have been blended together this time, instead of being used on their own in a single hop beer.

The beer pours a pale golden-orange colour with not much head or lacing — a standard trait of the Dragon series.

The smell immediately leaps out of the glass with a barrage of cantaloupe, tropical fruits, orange/tangerine and general hoppy goodness. There's also some malt sweetness to complement a light piney character on the finish.

Unfortunately, the taste is much less impressive than the nose. While there's a decent amount of bitterness up front, it's nothing special. This is followed by some spicy notes and a barely noticeable melon fruitiness that doesn't add much to the beer, and the finish has a long, lingering spicy bitterness to it.

Plaid Dragon is another case of a Dragon beer whose bite doesn't live up to its bark. The nose set the stage beautifully, but the taste falls flat in the end. While this isn't a bad beer, it doesn't fulfill its great potential, so it only earns a 7/10.



finer things

Emily Owens, M.D.

COMPILED BY Alana Willerton



For TV junkies, there's nothing worse than discovering a new show and falling in love with the characters, only to have it cancelled after a few short weeks — as is the case with *Emily Owens, M.D.*, a medical drama sadly coming to an end after just 13 episodes. The show — which will inevitably draw comparisons to programs like *Grey's Anatomy* — was cancelled after only six episodes, though the network thankfully decided to let the rest of the season air.

The show revolves around Emily Owens, a young intern who gets a job at the same hospital as both her high school nemesis and her university crush, who also happens to be her best friend. While it's admittedly true that the show doesn't have the most creative concept, what it lacks in originality it makes up for in heart. This is mostly thanks to lead actor Mamie Gummer, playing the quirky, slightly nerdy main character who has a special touch with her patients.

Watching the show, it's no surprise that Gummer comes from good stock. As Meryl Streep's daughter, it's obvious Gummer has picked up a few cues from her mother's career. She especially shines when she shares the screen with actor Michael Rady, who plays a doctor with a crush of his own on Emily. The pair's evolution from friends to almost-lovers has been adorable to watch over the series, and the world of TV is going to be a little bleaker without them.

While it's a crime to take it off the air, *Emily Owens, M.D.* deserves to be classified as one of the finer things in pop culture before it's banished from our screens.

The Finer Things is a semi-regular feature in which Gateway pop culture pundits point to a particularly relevant or pretentious example of art celebrating it for all of its subjective merit.