

BWW Review: Be Mystified by HOAX at MAP

by Cybele Pomeroy Jul. 28, 2016



Imagine a magician struck by conscience. Imagine a circus side-show. Imagine a period piece. Imagine disillusionment. Imagine a bar in a basement, partially cleared of kitsch representing multiple iterations of Early American Grandmother decor. Imagine seating for 100 guests. Imagine a very short show with a short intermission.

If you've an interest in the unusual, if you have sampled traditional theatre and avant garde theatre and found them both not quite what you wanted, if you'd like to gather a few of your friends and your favorite '50s fancy duds, if you'd like an evening out that isn't clubbing and isn't

pizza, do consider HOAX.

Before arriving to review the show, I receive a missive from one of the show's characters, a Miss Sarah Swanson, as follows:

"Don't get too big for your britches. Just because we've invited you doesn't mean you can come dressed in your pajamas. If you want to be entertained by the likes of Max and I, please come dressed in your best Mad Men-esque, 1950s-style attire."

HOAX, presented at the Maryland Art Place (MAP), which is a quiet little haven of art and attitude tucked among the shouty storefronts of Saratoga Street, is another brainchild of Brian Kehoe and Annelise Montone, who produced last year's *Planchette*. It is not precisely a magic show, though it features a great deal of sleight of hand and equal amounts of audience involvement- you'll be glad you dressed nicely, in my point- and is an intensely focussed experience that relies heavily on the charm of the main character, Maxwell Fink, suavely portrayed by co-writer Brian Kehoe.



Physically potent but a little more difficult to hear (compared to the articulate Kehoe) is the other co-writer Annelise Montone, playing truculent magician's assistant Sarah Swanson. Her swishing and flouncing are delightful to watch and she looks perfectly at home among designer Harley Winkler's modular, color-coordinated set pieces.

The script hints at remorse, at dissatisfaction with status quo, urges non-specific warnings to the erstwhile audience, suggests impending doom. The Devil is mentioned. The ending is not the

climactic experience we expect. I am left feeling that the script has something to say, but I am not sure what. I am uncomfortably suspicious that the script isn't quite certain, either. Maxwell Fink's bio provides some clues, should one visit the website after (or before) the performance.

Tech production is fairly high-value. While keeping visible devices in line with mid-fifties period-available apparti, the show integrates lighting, sound, music, projections and hands-on, hand built props to create a sensory-rich environment. The lone tech isn't credited, but does a flawless job and has an excellent hairdo.

The barkeep is a charming diversion, and there are beverages, both alcoholic and non-, for whistle wetting pre- and post-performance- cash only, as in days of yore. Have a nosh before your arrival, for there are no snacks.

Parking is available on the street, and there are a few lots nearby.



Performances take place Fridays and Saturdays through August 20th at Maryland Art Place, 218 West Saratoga Street, Baltimore, MD

Plan to arrive by 7:50, as there is NO late seating.

For tickets, contact BoxOffice@MaxwellFink.com or 443-681-9229

Further information is available at MaxwellFink.com

Photo credit: Rob Vary