

# Chicago Tribune

## Simplified 'Superman' at Donny's Skybox

Reviews: "Superman 2050" ★★★

As the mega-spectacle "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark" struggles to reboot on Broadway, a Chicago theater company has configured a far more minimalist solution to the complications of staging a superhero myth within the confines of a theater space.

Though it hits all the usual Superman signposts — Smallville, The Daily Planet, Lex Luthor, Kryptonite, Lois Lane — there is not a single aerial stunt in Theater Un-Speak-Able's "Superman: 2050." Dull, you might think — and you would be wrong. So wrong! Embracing the ethos of physical theater — a genre of performance that relies on movement and body language as a key element of storytelling — the ensemble conveys a thrilling amount of action and plot. Most of it stems from optical illusions and a sense of playful "let's pretend" (arms and torsos suddenly represent the inside of an elevator **car**, for example). And yes, there is flying, believe it or not.

It is an instructive **lesson** to all those big-budget behemoths and their expensive effects; the silly power of this imaginative, bare-bones production can not be overstated. The show will not change your world, but it is entertaining, both tongue-in-cheek and utterly sincere. True, it runs at midnights Saturday, which may be a hard sell for some audiences, but it also has a deliciously short running time of just 35 minutes. Aside from the costumes (each actor wears identical royal blue leggings and athletic tops), the only production design in the show is a 21-square foot wooden platform (the dimensions, roughly, of a parking space for a **compact car**) upon which the entire seven-member cast is perched.

That platform becomes the stage itself. No one steps off at any point during the performance and they find a remarkable range of movement within that tiny playing area. It is an ingenious idea, that absurd little platform — condensing the focus of each scene and subverting the show's primary limitation, i.e. the lack of **special effects**. The performances are just as vital to the success of this experiment, particularly Kathleen Wrinn's Lois, who is both sardonic and delightfully wide-eyed, Marc Frost (who is also the show's creator) as Superman and Thomas Kelly's mustachioed villainy as Lex Luthor. The ensemble creates all of the scenery with their bodies and sound effects with their mouths, including a hummed version of Superman's theme song from the movies, and of course his glistening smile, which comes with an audible "bing." Nice touch.

*Through June 18 at Donny's Skybox in Piper's Alley, 1608 N. Wells St.; tickets are \$12 at 312-337-3992 or **secondcity.com***