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Simplified 'Superman' at Donny's Skybox

slow-moving 'Office Space'

Reviews: "Superman 2050" ★★★ and "Cubicle! An Office Space Musical" ★★

May 24, 2011 | By Nina Metz, Tribune reporter

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"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.

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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***

"Cubicle! An Office Space Musical" ★★

Capturing workplace drudgery with an eye for detail, the 1999 comedy "[Office Space](#)" has been adapted into a musical by New Millennium Theatre Company that captures the perpetual frustration embodied by the emasculated desk jockeys of the film.

Adaptation is always a tricky proposition. You have to recreate all the qualities that made the original appealing in the first place, while at the same time offering something new and unique and specific to the strengths of a theater production.

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I'd say the creative team here succeeds about half the time on that front, with Milton (Guy Schingoethe, as the stapler-obsessed office weirdo) breaking out in a confident baritone, a hilarious juxtaposition to the character's mumbling passive aggressive buffoon act. There's also an operatic version of "Damn It Feels Good to be a Gangster," a song that plays a key role in the film. I was also a fan of Sean Harklerode's turn as the slimy boss Lumburgh.

But for a late-night show, the production is awfully heavy on its feet. Speed would help things

considerably and help disguise some of the show's weaker moments.

Through June 4 at Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont Ave.; tickets are \$17-\$20 at 773-975-8150 or nmtchicago.org

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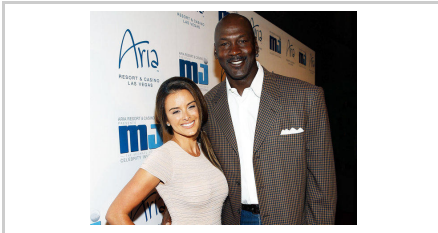
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