

## **From the Minneapolis/St. Paul City Pages**

<http://citypages.com/databank/27/1340/article14615.asp?page=2>.

Volume 27 - Issue 1340 - Cover Story - August 9, 2006

### **How to Cheat**

*The New Theatre Group*

In Alan Berks's sharp new drama, a married journalist (Emily Gunyou) and a single stem-cell researcher with a lascivious eye (Randy Reyes) steal off for some private time in an upstairs room while the party continues below. The dialogue rings nicely, with even the science-and-life metaphors going down well. And Gunyou and Reyes give complicated and magnetic performances, particularly when their dalliance is represented by a heated game of cards. Note to self: When preparing for extramarital dalliances, always brush up on gin rummy. Thu 5:30 p.m., Sat 7:00 p.m. U of M Rarig Center Arena.

—Quinton Skinner

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## **From the Minneapolis StarTribune**

<http://www.startribune.com/121/story/597536.html>

### **HOW TO CHEAT**

As infidelity plays go, this one is at least heartfelt, well-written and ably acted. Playwright Alan Berks lucked out with the casting, as Emily Gunyou and Randy Reyes bring the brittle two-hander to life. The dialogue is of the liberal, clipped, slightly upper-crusty variety, as married Meredith meets Luis in a storage room while a party goes on elsewhere in a big house. They circle each other, then hook up, then deal with the fallout of their actions. The serious themes about happiness, regret, faithfulness, sex and cheating are leavened with enough laugh lines to keep it all from becoming a bit too much. (5:30 p.m.

Thursday, 7 p.m. Saturday. Rarig Center, 330 S. 21st St.)

CLAUDE PECK

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## **From the MNArts website**

<http://www.mnartists.org/article.do?rid=111900>

## **Fringe Shorts: How to Cheat**

August 6, 2006

Jaime Kleiman

Because this is a Fringe show and because it only has three performances left, I'm going to cut to the chase: How To Cheat is really, really good.

Playwright Alan Berks has written a two-hander starring Randy Reyes and Emily Gunyou, about two people who—you guessed it—have an affair. The basic story is as follows: Meredith (Gunyou) and Louie (Reyes) are at a fancy, rich people party. They get a little drunk and admit to each other that they can't stand the shallow attempts at wit and the prejudices of the privileged white folk, so they run off and hide in an abandoned room full of toys from the late 70's—what Louie nostalgically calls the “future antiques” of his childhood—and the seduction begins.

How To Cheat takes us through one night, from the beginning of Meredith and Louie's coyly erotic dance to the eruption of the morning after. Though it calls to mind plays like Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* and John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation*, it is most definitely its own thing. Nor does it pull a *Same Time, Next Year* and reduce a night of passion to a lifetime of escapism and contentment. (Oddly, all of these plays have recently been produced by the Jungle. Don't really know what that means, except that Berks and director Brian Balcom's originality trumps all of those productions.)

Anyone who's cheated on their lover or spouse will probably identify with Gunyou's character, a woman torn between her own unhappiness and the noose on her finger. For his part, Reyes' Louie, a biochemist and self-described womanizer, feels no moral quandaries whatsoever until he realizes that Meredith has not only leapt into his pants, but also into his heart.

Director Balcom guides the actors with a firm and knowing hand. His mark is all over it (as is Brian Sostek's playful choreography), and Berks had the luxury of writing with Gunyou and Reyes in mind. It's a happy collaboration that shows everyone at their best.

How To Cheat is full of many surprises, including the hottest, most inventive coitus I've ever seen on the stage. Don't worry—it's not bawdy or cheap and it doesn't involve massive amounts of spit. Like many things in this lovingly constructed play, it's not what you expect. It's better.

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### **From Two Jew reviews**

[www.twojews.com/flog](http://www.twojews.com/flog)

MINNESOTA FRINGE 2006!

Sunday, August 13th

### **HOW TO CHEAT**

**Goy David** - A well-mounted, mature piece amidst the fart jokes and self-conscious posturing that too often litter the Fringe landscape. Presented as a "new work" (by Alan Berks), there's scarcely anything left to fix, edit, or append- the one-room story runs the gamut, from emotional gameplaying to flights of fancy, all with the minor props on hand and two actors who have taken the time necessary to truly understand their characters, thus allowing us to truly believe what they have to say. Which is good, because the actors (Randy Reyes, Emily Gunyou) are about eight years shy of the purported age of the characters they portray, leading to a credibility gap that they manage to close with their command of the craft of, well, "acting". The casting issue constitutes, for me, the only semi-serious problem with the production, otherwise a confidently mounted, well-paced, impressively directed (Brian Balcom) and acted interlude. At twojew.com we spend more time on the crapola, and I'm out of review-fuel on this one...

[http://www.fringefestival.org/blg\\_showPost.cfm?blogID=4&id=1515](http://www.fringefestival.org/blg_showPost.cfm?blogID=4&id=1515)

## **Single White Fringe Geek (and Mom)**

### **Review - How To Cheat**

**Saturday, August 5, 2006 at 2:26 PM**

**Filed under 5 Star Shows - Life Altering Experience**

**How To Cheat** - New Theater Group - U of M Rarig Center Arena

(Mom gives it 4-1/2, but I give it 5)

Mom says, "It was a great ride, and I was happy to go along. Great script, great actors, great directing, just all around great. And the card scene - wow! Just - wow!"

I heartily concur on all fronts. A top notch piece of work from all concerned.

A married journalist (Emily Gunyou) begins an affair with a scientist (Randy Reyes) in an abandoned room full of memories in a mansion holding a high class party, and the fallout ranges farther than either of them expect.

The script by Alan Berks is full of wit and insight - "not just witty, but clever," my mother hastens to add, implying the second is better, and I think I understand what she's driving at. This isn't just a funny script, though waves of laughter coursed through the audience throughout the performance. There is meat, something substantial, that seems to lurk under almost every single line, and the director Brian Balcom expertly guides his two accomplished actors into this secret world.

It isn't wholly naturalistic - dance sequences and dreams erupt from seemingly normal scenes without preface or explanation - but somehow it all fits. In a way, you have to attack subject matter like this from different angles if you ever hope to crack it open and make it something more than just two people hooking up.

These two people represent two classes, two races, two different ways of looking at what passes for civilization, morality and order. Every layer of who they are and how they are both the same and different and the ways those create friction, both pleasant and unpleasant, are unfolded before us in unique ways. Nothing is ever quite what we expect, or has the standard results.

The quest for individual happiness against a backdrop of the larger world coming apart at the seams takes on more immediate meaning when the cause of intermittent power outages early in the evening becomes ominously clear toward the end.

The aforementioned card scene - actually a clever stand-in for sexual intercourse - is almost as much a playful discovery for the audience as it is for the lovers themselves. A sudden flurry of cards at the end and we all feel the need for a cigarette.

Mom wants to see it expanded into a larger play, thinks it's wonderful now but that it's also the beginning of something even greater. And there is that question of "what danger lies ahead of them, what altered world will they enter, when they leave that room together?" It's a compelling cliffhanger - a great point at which to stop for this Fringe show. Perhaps it doesn't need to or shouldn't be answered. Perhaps the many questions - personal and global - swirling in our minds after experiencing the play are enough. Mission Accomplished - if you'll pardon the expression.

Still, one wonders, if the artists involved were all this good at dissecting the personal, what might they do with a much larger canvas, and much larger subject? With this crew, I don't think anything's beyond them. Regardless of whether this particular story continues, I look forward to seeing the work of all those involved - collective or individual - again very soon.

Very highly recommended.