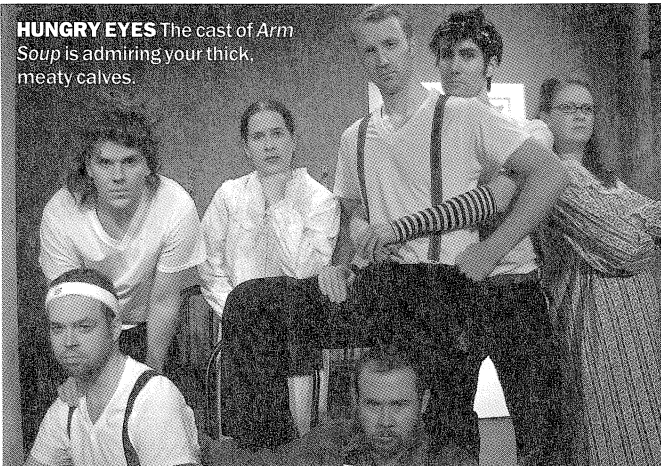


Comedy

Reviews

Arm Soup: The Story of How Five People Went West and Ate Each Other

HUNGRY EYES The cast of *Arm Soup* is admiring your thick, meaty calves.



Annoyance Theatre, open run.

Go ahead and read the title again: The overarching story of this Annoyance musical venture is spelled out before nary a four-letter word is uttered. Billed as a modern-day take on the Donners' cannibalistic trek in the

1840s, *Arm Soup* relies too heavily on the ridiculousness inherent in people eating people. As such, the theater's irreverent, satirical voice is muddled among flat jokes and few plot twists.

Back in the day, the Donner Party—87 Midwesterners with a bad case of "westerling fever"—got caught in a Sierra Nevada snowstorm on their

way to California. Rations were depleted; people were devoured.

Arm Soup modernizes this unfortunate tale. George Donner (Heath Cordts) and his ex-girlfriend (Emily Wilson) find themselves sharing an unfortunate eHarmony date at the Olive Garden. When the bottomless breadstick basket runs dry, Donner and his lady decide to head West in a covered wagon with a cast of oddballs. They seek guidance from Wade Boggs (George McAuliffe) and Corbin Bernsen (Mark Vannier). Later, they eat each other's penises.

The scenes, while well acted and comically self-aware, are overwrought with lines shocking for shock's sake. Case in point: The over-aged, oversexual boozehound Mrs. Keseberg (Brooke Bagnall) masturbates; a character wonders aloud what smells like old cream-of-mushroom soup.

The songs (the strongest being the show's intro number, "Boring and Gay"), written by Tony Mendoza and Sam Locke, are refreshing, original and taken to extreme levels of farce—things the rest of the show fails to deliver.—*Steve Heisler*

The Mary Kay Letourneau Story: A Karaoke Musical

Gorilla Tango Theatre Chicago, through Feb 23.

This brave effort from Gorilla Tango infuses it's-too-crazy-to-be-made-up source material with pathos and character development, providing a low-budget reminder of how compelling sketch comedy can be. Yet, while the show expertly mixes story with funny, it suffers from an identity crisis of sorts: the frequent alternation between great scenes and lame songs damages the show's momentum. *Mary Kay* is, truly, a funny musical that would be better off without the music.

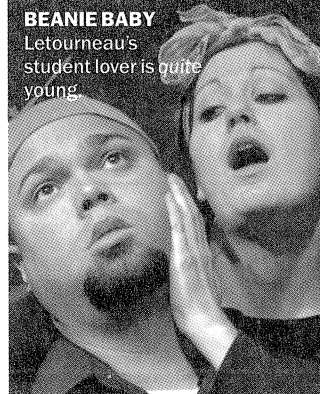
Letourneau, in case you've tried to forget, was an elementary-school teacher and mother of four when she had an affair with a sixth-grade student in 1996. After serving prison time, she and the student, then 21, married in a televised ceremony.

Gorilla Tango doesn't just aim for

easy targets—Letourneau and her young lover. The company scatters its fire with caricatures of teacher's dopey frat-boy husband, slick congressman father and two local cops who make Mark Fuhrman look like Officer Krupke. Leslie Nesbit breathes new life into the senile grandmother stereotype, unblinkingly dropping punch lines on everything from dead cats to sexual acrobatics. The whole cast merits high marks for creating funny characters without hyperbolizing.

And then everyone starts singing, karaoke-style, changing the words to classic tunes. None of the songs after the opener ("Mary Kay," to the tune of "Runaround Sue") tell anything new about the story or advance the plot.

The same directorial confusion is evident in the play's improvlike staging—half the stage devoted to action, half full of the remaining cast, laughing and cheering on the actors. Even more confusing is why, in a play



BEANIE BABY Letourneau's student lover is quite young.

with countless quick changes, does an entire half of the stage go unused?

Despite its imperfections, this Gorilla Tango production is worth it for both the cast's ambitious characters and the best mimed bathroom scene we've seen in a while.—*Brian Golden*

Listings

If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail, e-mail (comedy@timeoutchicago.com) or fax (312-924-9350) to **Steve Heisler**. Include details, dates, times, address of venue with cross streets, nearest El station or bus routes, contact information and admission price, if any. **Deadline is noon on Monday, ten days before publication date.** Incomplete submissions will not be included, and information will not be accepted over the phone. Listings are free but, as space is limited, inclusion is not guaranteed.

* Recommended or notable

Thursday 8

* **ComedySportz Chicago Center for the Performing Arts**, 777 N Green St at Chicago Ave (312-733-6000). El: *Blue to Chicago*. Bus: 8 Halsted, 66 Chicago (24 hrs). 8pm, \$17. This theater's fast-paced, family-friendly shows offer high-energy, game-based improv.

Despondent Confrontation + Sustain I.O. Del Close Theater, 3541 N Clark St between Cornelia and Eddy Sts (773-880-0199). El: *Red to Addison*. Bus: 22 Clark (24 hrs), 152 Addison. 8pm, \$5. Interacting with invisible characters is always a delicate thing for comedians to pull off, but Ben Seeder, in *Despondent Confrontation*, seems to have mastered this skill. His one-man show finds him diving into scenes with aplomb and subtle charisma. He's joined by *Sustain*, Brandon Sornberger's story of a children's theater performer in NYC during September 11.

Disposable Nation *The Second City* e.t.c., 1608 N Wells St at North Ave (312-337-3992). El: *Brown, Purple (rush hrs) to Sedgwick*. Bus: 11, 22 (24 hrs), 36, 72, 156. 8pm, \$18. Whether it's kicking Pluto out of our definition of the solar system, our nation seeks to do away with a lot. While the show's funny enough, it attempts to address some lofty issues with mixed results.

Harold I.O. Cabaret, 3541 N Clark St between Cornelia and Eddy Sts (773-880-0199). El: *Red to Addison*. Bus: 22 Clark (24 hrs), 152 Addison. 8pm, \$12. This is I.O.'s signature long-form improv show, in which teams create a cohesive series of scenes from audience suggestions.

* **The Lincoln Lodge Lincoln Restaurant**, 4008 N Lincoln Ave at Irving Park Rd (773-251-1539). El: *Brown to Irving Park*. Bus: 11, 50, 80. 9pm, \$8. This stand-up comedy room is top-notch, drawing some of Chicago's strongest alt-comics. Shows mix "man on the street" interviews with solid mike time.

* **War! Now in Its 4th Smash Year!** *The Second City Mainstage*, 1616 N Wells St at North Ave (312-337-3992). El: *Brown, Purple (rush hrs) to Sedgwick*. Bus: 11, 22 (24 hrs), 36, 72, 156. 8pm, \$18. The extremely talented mainstage cast is anything but gun shy in this spot-on revue, sparked by a political landscape wrought with immigration woes, gay marriage dilemmas and everyday lies.

Friday 9

Arm Soup: The Story of How Five People Went West and Ate Each Other Annoyance Theatre, 4840 N Broadway