

## Strange and exhilarating theatre performance



[boxhead] runs at the Buddies in Bad Times theatre until Nov. 2.  
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Bruce DeMara  
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

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### [boxhead]

★★★★ (out of 4)

By Darren O'Donnell. Directed by Chris Abraham. Until Nov 2 at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, 12 Alexander St. **416-975-8555**.

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It opens with a loud boom and long percussive riff, an ingeniously clever way to quell the chatter and draw immediate focus to the darkened stage, where the only things visible are a pair of cool blue Day-Glo gloves on the nimble hands of musician Romano Di Nillo.

After that, *[boxhead]* unfolds, a story about an unnamed geneticist who wakes up one day with a box – yup, a box – on his head. He proceeds to clone himself into two characters, Dr. Wishful Thinking and Dr. Thoughtless Actions, who also have boxes on their heads.

The unseen voice of an omnipotent narrator – God, perhaps, it certainly has an air of authority – also manages to split into two identical parts. Thereafter follows one of the oddest but strangely exhilarating theatre experiences one is likely to encounter, a bewilderingly wild and profane ride. The production was originally mounted in 1999 and remounted twice since, with much of the original creative team reunited for the latest production. **(over→)**

This is a very fortunate thing because the staging of this dizzyingly unconventional meditation on existence requires a kind of technical skill and split-second timing involving spotlights and music cues – synchronicity, to coin O'Donnell's word – that in less capable hands may well have caused the whole thing to unravel.

Similar technical razzle-dazzle transforms the voices of the two actors through a speech box producing an almost munchkin-like timbre, while the formless voice of God has the ominous pitch of a late-night anonymous phone caller who seems to know your every move.

The stage and set design by Naomi Campbell, O'Donnell and director Chris Abraham, surrounds the stage in a large backlit picture frame while a gauzy black, almost imperceptible screen meaningfully separates the players from the audience. Like all the other technical elements, it is superbly effective.

There are a few musical numbers, a lot of frenetic dialogue requiring careful attention, periodic cussing and even a prolonged scene of frontal nudity, which is hilariously uninhibited and not for the bashful, courtesy of Adam Lazarus.

Comically absurd, maddingly baffling in form and meaning but solid in execution, *[boxhead]* is experimental theatre at its finest.