

BACK STAGE WEST

REVIEWS

PARTY SHOW at the Actor's Lab



Reviewed by Anne Kelly-Saxenmeyer

Entertainment above all is the Burglars of Hamm credo, and the troupe's newest creation is certainly nothing short of a party. What makes it more than a string of clever gimmicks and easy jokes on the theme of "rockin' it hard," however, is the Burglars' willingness to hit close to home and defy expectation. No cheap sketches or tired riffs on pop culture here. Instead, the talented sextet explores the question that's really on its collective minds: Six years past the birth of the edgy little company, are the thirtysomething Burglars "gross and old"?

The answer lies in a challenge from party god Sammy Hagar, who visits the Burglars in the form of a disembodied Oz-like head. To prove they've still got the stuff, the Burglars must throw the ultimate rager or face Hagar's murderous wrath. As they struggle to pass the test, the material becomes increasingly personal and increasingly bizarre. The Burglars—Matt Almos (who directs with Albert Dayan), Carolyn Almos, Jon Beauregard, Todd Merrill, Victor Ortado, and Selina Woolery Smith, all going by their real names onstage—offer their hang-ups about everything from advancing age to sexual preference to childhood obesity as comic fodder, and while there's no telling fact from fiction, the implication is that a real history of relationships inspires the writing. All the while the party parameters keep exploding. The refreshments step up from "orange whip" (beer) to margaritas to Jell-O shots to cocaine to eyeball-injected heroine, the festivities from dancing and making out to live sex to giddy cannibalism.

For a show that doesn't rely on tricks and spectacle, it boasts plenty of both. The party erupts in the lobby, where suddenly drunken people are mugging for a video camera—the resulting video becomes Exhibit A. Later in the show, there's also a very artful 3-D video (produced/directed by Ortado and Sean Israelit) that takes us inside the Burglars' drug-raw psyches. Teresa Shea provides a pliable scenic design complete with black-light murals and a giant talking head (props by

Beauregard), complemented by Jonathan Klein's party lighting. The Burglars' musical talents provide further diversion, producing a raucous rendition of Tom Waits' "I Don't Wanna Grow Up."

Amid all the weird fun, a good part of the show's interest lies in the lulls, in the "what now?" feeling that Almos and Dayan introduce at the start, as the Burglars sit in silent contemplation and watch the video of their lobby revels. In this pose, echoed throughout the show, the Burglars are not aging party animals despairing over lost stamina; they are artists taking stock and finding ways to perform themselves into the new. Are the Burglars gross and old? Nah. Can they still party? Hell, yeah.

"Party Show," presented by Burglars of Hamm at the Actor's Lab, 1514 N. Gardner, Hollywood. Fri.-Sat. 8 p.m., Fri.-Sat. 10:30 p.m., Thurs.-Sun. 8 p.m. Apr. 4-May 11. \$15. (323) 769-6334.



BURGLARS
of Hamm