

# Los Angeles Times

FRIDAY, September 24, 2010

## THEATER — Critic's Choice!



PAUL RUBENSTEIN

**'PARADISE PARK':** Reha Zemani, left, Troy Dunn and Lena Kouyoumdjian in Charles L. Mee's kaleidoscopic amusement-park vignettes at City Garage.

### It's a postcard from 'Paradise'

"Because the theatre is the art form that deals above all others in human relationships, then theatre is the art, par excellence, in which we discover what it is to be human and what is possible for humans to be."

That summation from "Paradise Park" encapsulates both Charles L. Mee's absurdist comedy and its breakneck, breathtaking L.A. premiere at City Garage, the company's final outing in its alley space after 15 years.

As fans and detractors alike know, playwright Mee is an iconoclast without compare. In a kaleidoscopic series of amusement-park vignettes, Mee touches on themes of existential alienation and, ultimately, love like a trapeze artist leaving inex-

plicably hilarious, obliquely touching motion traces in his wake.

Director Frédérique Michel's signature blend of loopy and sardonic is on full display, and designer Charles Duncombe turns his trademark usage of specific colors and isolated elements — for example, a wading pool sporting a crocodile — into pure ethos.

The cast, swanning about to sound designer Paul Rubenstein's eclectic scoring, wearing Josephine Poinot's coy costumes with abandon, is terrific. Bo Roberts and the redoubtable Cynthia Mance as shakily married tourists perfectly counter K.C. Wright's edgy daughter and Tim Orona's cross-dressing inamorata. Kenneth Rudnicki's park newcomer dovetails with Reha Zemani's dream-troubled Midwesterner. Lena Kouyoumdjian's serene violinist and Jeff Atik's antic

jack-of-many-trades — including a chicken — make potent opposite poles. Company stalwart Troy Dunn merges wryness and poignancy as clown Vikram, and Ann Stocking's ventriloquist is mesmerizing, no mean feat given that David E. Frank turns his bipolar dummies into a tour de force.

So is "Paradise Park," though it's hardly for all tastes. Still, to miss this representative valedictory is unthinkable.

— DAVID C. NICHOLS