



Don't Read the Comments
makes you laugh and think

Description

The Centaur Theatre Wildside Festival offering examines the spectrum of consent

By **Julia Ainsworth**

Don't Read the Comments, produced by **Sermo Scomber Theatre**, created and directed by **Sarah Segal-Lazar** in collaboration with the cast, is an entertaining work that uses clown to examine the spectrum of consent in a post #metoo era.

This production featured as part of the **2020 Centaur Theatre's Wildside Festival**, is the third staging of the play, which premiered at the Montreal Fringe Festival in 2018, winning the award of Most Promising English Company, and was presented at the Segal Centre's Studio Theatre in 2019.

Set at a recording of a talk show, the play casts us as its live studio audience. Keeping the house lights up at a low level lets us know we're in on the action. We meet the feisty Oprahesque show host and her three "larger than life" panellists with wildly differing views on consent (a 4th wave feminist and student, a "self-proclaimed" male feminist/ally, and a right-leaning politician) and watch as the sparks fly.

The clever use of clown in this piece draws on the tradition of *Bouffon*, used historically to upend social judgement and morality through humour and satire.

The energetic ensemble (featuring **Cara Krisman, Gabe Maharjan, Joy Ross-Jones, Dakota Jamal Wellman**) embodies diverging perspectives with rapid-fire pacing, precise character work, and bold physical comedy, bringing to life the hilarious chaos that ensues when extreme points of view converge on this triggering subject. The host engages her guests in a series of games including "Act it Out!" and "Read the Signals" and asks the audience to answer questions by a show of applause.



The clever use of clown in this piece draws on the tradition of *Bouffon*, used historically to upend social judgement and morality through humour and satire. This treatment permits us to laugh at the absurd and often hypocritical aspects of public debate surrounding the #metoo movement and #rapeculture.

As you watch the characters go to grotesque lengths to stretch their political beliefs, you may find yourself rolling your eyes and shaking your head in disbelief. That is until the final guest appears. The host tells us to call her Pamela, “to protect her identity”. Played by Sarah Segal-Lazar, Pamela’s nuanced monologue about her complex experience with the “grey areas” of consent and sexual assault suddenly appears alien in contrast with the colourful cast of clown characters. We are left grappling with the two incongruent worlds of the play and struggling to place “Pamela” in the home of the Bouffons.

In the post-show conversation, Sarah Segal-Lazar reveals the final twist. The script is based on verbatim text gathered from articles published by the New York Times and Washington Post, reminding us these “clowns” are not as far from the truth as we would like to believe.

This sharply crafted, entertaining play will make you laugh and think (often simultaneously).

Don't Read the Comments runs until **Saturday, January 18** at Centaur Theatre's Wildside Festival.



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centaurtheatre.com/box-office/tickets

Images: courtesy of Sermo Scomber Theatre

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Julia Ainsworth is a Montreal-based writer, theatre artist and arts educator. She holds a B.F.A in Theatre from York University and B. Ed from Queens.



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