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Review of ‘An Empty Plate in the Café du Grand Boeuf’

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Beginning with last year's *Yoko Ono Imagine Peace* exhibition at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery and continuing through Ghostbird Theatre's nonperformance recently at the opening of *Quest for Permanence* at the Art Gallery at Florida Gulf Coast University, Southwest Florida patrons of the arts have been reveling in the drumbeat of conceptual art. That heady movement continues tonight at Lab Theater, with Michael Hollinger's *An Empty Plate in the Café du Grand Boeuf*.



Imagine sitting in the finest restaurant in all of Paris, where a master chef and wait staff stand at the ready to satisfy your every culinary desire or gastronomical whim. Money is no object. You can have anything on the wine list or menu. Anything at all. But instead of actually savoring every tantalizing morsel of a four-star seven-course French meal capped by chateaubriand and crème



brulee, you simply sit at table staring at an empty porcelain plate as your waiter describes in mouth-watering detail what the chef has whipped up behind the double swinging doors that separate the dining room from the fully-stocked gourmet kitchen.

If you really want to maximize your experience at *An Empty Plate in the Café du Grand Boeuf*,



don't dine beforehand. More, make a late night reservation at The Veranda, where you can actually enjoy the finest Chateaubriand in town. Then settle in your seat and listen intently, perhaps even closing your eyes from time to time, as Mike Dinko a' la Claude takes Victor a' la Ken Bryant from *le potage* to *le dessert*. Not a masochist, *n'est pas?* *C'est dommage*. But that's okay. Dinko's going



to get you salivating even if you come with a full tummy.

The plot crafted by Michael Hollinger is actually rather clever. Victor is a multi-millionaire. He owns the Café du Grand Boeuf. But here's the rub (pun intended). He's the only patron. He retains Gaston, Claude, Mimi and Antoine for the sole and narcissistic purpose of preparing meals for him and his lady whenever and as often as



they wish to dine. But on this night, Victor has come to the café

inexplicably bereft of his the love of his life. Without her, he has lost his appetite for living and so he's resolved to starve himself to death. This Claude cannot suffer. Deep down, Claude not only loves the old man, he is genuinely fond of him as well. So he comes up with a diabolical plot for enticing the old man to eat. He will have Gaston prepare a meal consisting of all of Victor's favorite menu items "from soup to nuts," and then describe each course in excruciating detail until Victor cracks and begs for him to bring him the actual food itself.



Ken Bryant, Juan Alejandro, Marta Sand and Sage Meyers excel as Victor, Antoine, Mimi and Louise, but this is Mike Dinko's show. Less than a year ago, Dinko was behind the ticket counter and concession stand, as Lab Theater's Front of House Manager. But since starring as Theo in Steve Martin's *The Underpants*, his theatrical skills and stage presence have grown by leaps and bounds. While he doesn't leap or bound in *Empty Plate*, it's no mean feat to recite a shopping list of succulent



ingredients and toothsome repasts in a way sure to drive the likes of Gordon Ramsay, Rachael Ray or Andrew Zimmern totally insane, but to do it with a French accent seems an almost impossible feat.

If tension is the key ingredient in the recipe for good theater, then you will find this play to be perfectly seasoned. Playwright Michael Hollinger brings the ample internal and external conflicts that haunt his characters to a roiling boil by play's end, but the plot twists and surprise endings will keep you as off-balance as



one too many aperitifs. And so it is that this review must say no more. If you already know the ending, don't spoil the surprise for anyone else or there will be no soup for you! Worse, the cast may haul you up on stage after the denouement and force you to eat some of Victor's left over crème brulee. And whether you know the ending or not, this is a fun and entertaining night out. But come hungry and eat later. You'll be glad you did.

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3 Responses to "Review of 'An Empty Plate in the Café du Grand Boeuf'"



1. [Annette K Trossbach](#) says:
[June 4, 2016 at 5:36 pm](#)

Thank you so much, Tom Hall, for this and all you do for the ARTS in SWFL!

[reply](#)



2. [Mike Dinko](#) says:
[June 4, 2016 at 8:13 pm](#)

Tom and Connie, I'm without words to say how happy I am you both enjoyed the show. There is no pay for community theater, but your appreciation of my work is golden!

[reply](#)



3. [Annette K Trossbach](#) says:
[June 4, 2016 at 9:30 pm](#)

And Tickets can be purchased at <http://www.laboratorytheaterflorida.com> or by following this link:
<http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/2538846>

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About the Author



Tom Hall is both an amateur artist and aspiring novelist who writes art quest thrillers. He is in the final stages of completing his debut novel titled "Art Detective," a story that fictionalizes the discovery of the fabled billion-dollar Impressionist collection of Parisian art dealer Josse Bernheim-Jeune, thought by many to have perished during World War II when the collection's hiding place, Castle de Rastignac in southern France, was destroyed by the Wehrmacht in reprisal for attacks made by members of the Resistance operating in the area. A former tax attorney, Tom holds a bachelor's degree as well as both a juris doctorate and masters of laws in taxation from the University of Florida. Tom lives in Estero, Florida with his fiancée, Connie, and their four cats.

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