

The Flaming Idiots

By Albert Williams

This Texas-bred trio, who began as street entertainers in Austin 18 years ago, offer an ingenious and hilarious blend of clowning, juggling, acrobatics, and magic show. Rob Williams, Jon O'Connor, and Kevin Hunt--aka Gyro, Pyro, and Walter--toss off their virtuosic routines with comic flair and crafty showmanship, juggling torches, tenpins, knives, balls, and other objects with hip insouciance. Adding to the fun are unusual twists on audience participation: viewers are invited to pelt the guys with tennis balls, kick them in the shins if they drop a knife, and eat sandwiches served by foot. In one of the most exciting bits--a variation on a classic trust exercise--the group struggle to extricate themselves from a three-way straitjacket in time to catch someone before he falls. Chicago-area audiences have a strong affinity for circus-theater combos--from the Flying Karamazov Brothers in the 1970s to Lookingglass and the Midnight Circus today--so the Flaming Idiots should do well when they launch their U.S. tour here. Northlight Theatre, North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie, 9501 Skokie Blvd., Skokie, 847-673-6300. Opens Wednesday, September 18, 8 PM. Through September 22: Thursday, 1 and 8 PM; Friday, 8 PM; Saturday, 3 and 8 PM; Sunday, 2:30 and 7 PM. \$30-\$35. Note: The 3 PM show Saturday is a benefit for the Actors Gymnasium. \$55 (includes postshow reception); call 847-328-2795.

Art accompanying story in printed newspaper (not available in this archive): photo/Brenda Ladd.