

Iktu Blas

By Jennifer Vanasco

Iktu Blas, Actors Gymnasium and Lookingglass Theatre, at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center. In Michael Montenegro's new, darkly funny puppet play, one becomes a monster by abandoning one's conscience in exchange for power, a process embodied in the interior world of the fictional Iktu Blas as he transforms himself into a dictator.

Since the play has little dialogue and all six actors wear large, slightly menacing papier-mache masks, the story of Blas's rise is told almost completely in pantomime. Rick Kubes excels at the subtle gestures needed to define Blas's slimy charisma, but he founders when he needs to convey meaning--especially when the usually capable ensemble is not backing him up. More effective are the tiny puppets used to illustrate Blas's feelings and memories. To show that the young Blas feels controlled by those around him, one small figure writhes desperately in a frame like a fly caught in a web. In a comment on nationalism and the pull of power, people push Blas around before he gives up his conscience (surgically removed by figures wielding meat cleavers and scissors), but afterward, as long as he shows strength, they support him.

The play occasionally slips into cliches and sentimentality--Iktu Blas was abused as a child. And it is sometimes obscure. But that's a small price to pay for an hour of interesting issues thoughtfully raised.

--Jennifer Vanasco