

## Review: The Magical Exploding Boy and the Invisible Circus/The Actors Gymnasium

### RECOMMENDED

The circus has come to Evanston. Actually, it never left; The Actors Gymnasium has been teaching the circus arts in Evanston for almost twenty years. Their latest endeavor, "The Magical Exploding Boy," is more a showcase of the professional and emerging talents making up the Actors Gymnasium (the program credits five professional artists and four times as many students) than an actual play.

The very loose plot here centers on Dean Evans (a veteran clown who has performed his art extensively in Chicago and New York City) trying (and failing) to make it in the corporate world. Evans, performing mostly as a mime and without makeup, is very amusing in his drift downward. His everyman looks and surprisingly subtle facial expressions go a long way in emphasizing the absurd. Will Howard plays the strong man who, literally, lifts Evans up from time to time. The two of them play well off one another and coax many laughs out of little more than just being on stage together. Tying things together somewhat is the wise, hobo clown Lindsey Noel Whiting who, armed with a ukulele, sings quirky, original songs that drive the production forward. The story still does not always make sense, but to paraphrase one of the songs, the plot points don't always have to add up. This is a circus act after all; it only has to entertain.

And it does entertain, with an almost constant barrage of (mostly) student ensemble members who pirouette on poles, suspend themselves up high and upside down and engage in other daring aerial feats. They also do a lot of dancing to well-choreographed numbers by Topeka Ellis. A standout is Simone Lazar, a professional artist who began her career at the age of seven as a student with The Actors Gymnasium. She dazzles as a contortionist, but her work on the lyra (an aerial hoop) is truly a thing of beauty, like a ballerina working her art from above. Many of the children performing (some as young as eight) cannot, understandably, match Simone's skill level, but their obvious enthusiasm and dedication provide a very infectious, positive vibe.

A few of the acts do go on a bit long, but otherwise this is a very high-energy and captivating piece that will leave you oohing and ahing. Although lead Dean Evans sometimes pretends otherwise, there are no lions and tigers here. And while it may be a bit of a stretch to call this performance death defying, it is certainly a thrilling show well worth a trip to Evanston. (Noel Schecter)

*The Actors Gymnasium*, 927 Noyes Street, Evanston, (847)328-2795, [theactorsgymnasium.com](http://theactorsgymnasium.com). \$15-\$20. Through March 23.

