

Zoinks! Ron Megee's 'Scooby-Doo' parody is spookily funny

By ROBERT TRUSSELL

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After years of watching Ron Megee direct, produce and perform what we can loosely call alternative theater, I can say this: Megee is as unpredictable as he is predictable.

On the predictable side, we all know what to expect — a crazed, postmodern take on a slice of pop culture executed with a sort of “hey-kids-let’s-put-on-a-trippy-show” sensibility.

At the same time, however, Megee is always looking for new entry points into the material, seeking new opportunities to twist a show into a pretzel on steroids.

His latest production is — and I’ll share the full title with you — “Spooky Dog: A Scooby-Doo-Like Mystery (Plagiarized, Improvised, Not for Kiddies)” by Eric Pliner and Amy Rhodes.

The title tells you most of what you need to know. It’s a parody of the Saturday morning animated series that premiered in 1969 about a gang of teenage detectives and a talking dog. This PG-13 version speculates on the characters’ backstories and is full of amusing references to drugs and budding sexuality. Nobody younger than 13 will be allowed to see the show.

This is officially a co-production between the Coterie Theatre and the UMKC Theater Department in cooperation with the Charlotte Street Foundation. The show is staged at La Esquina, the foundation’s performance/gallery space, and actors seeking their master of fine arts degrees play the principal roles.

And these actors are very funny. Bennett Ferguson as Spooky, Nicholas Gehlfuss as Scraggly, Helen Gonzalez as Thelma, Rachel Hirshorn as Tiffany and Tyler Horn as Ted have transformed themselves into three-dimensional cartoon characters who often mimic the static animation style of the original series.

They get some serious help from costume designer Jon Fulton Adams, who outfits them in molded-plastic tertiary-colored wigs — except for Ferguson, who sports a dog outfit with a padded rear and plastic nose. Scenic designer Mary Nichols and lighting designer Richard



Rich Sugg

The very funny cast of “Spooky Dog, A Scooby-Doo-Like Mystery” includes (left to right) Helen Gonzalez as Thelma, Nicholas Gehlfuss as Scraggly, Rachel Hirshorn as Tiffany, Bennett Ferguson as Spooky and Tyler Horn as Ted. The Coterie at Night production is at La Esquina, 1000 W. 25th St.

Sprecker convert the intimate performance space into a weirdly self-contained, two-dimensional universe representing the “Creepola County County Fair” grounds.

The actors have to be ready with ad-libs because some of what they do is in response to forms filled out by audience members before the show. On opening night, courtesy of a suggestion picked at random, the kids investigate the disappearance of Tiger Woods. And, yes, the rude and crude Tiger jokes come at a rapid clip.

Actors Martin Buchanan and Jessica Dressler make over-the-top contributions as Mr. and Mrs. Woodhaven, elderly owners of the fairgrounds. And Megee finds room to insert a couple of choreographed musical numbers. The show runs about an hour and probably could not have supported another five minutes because, after all, this is not the weightiest material on local stages at the moment.

Each cast member delivers a remarkable physical performance. Hirshorn’s ability to retain a saucer-eyed expression in every situation is memorable, to put it mildly. But most impressive, for my money, is Gehlfuss, who sustains a cracking voice and a posture that suggests a puppet hanging by slack strings.

This show is good, subversive fun. You might call it silliness infused with art.

the show

“Spooky Dog: A Scooby- Doo-Like Mystery (Plagiarized, Improvised, Not for Kiddies)” runs through March 7 at La Esquina, 1000 W. 25th St. Call 816-474-6552 or go to www.coterietheatre.org.