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Theater review: One myth take after another in 'Tales from Mount Olympus'

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By LAWSON TAITTE / The Dallas Morning News

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Bruce R. Coleman devised *Tales from Mount Olympus* because of a childhood enthusiasm for a book about Greek mythology. This family puppet show reflects his enthusiasm but doesn't really explain it.

Theatre Three staged the piece's world premiere in its basement series on Monday. Eight performers manipulate large puppets in the Japanese Bunraku style. Under black lights, the actors are virtually invisible. Titans, gods, humans and monsters show up mostly in bright oranges and fluorescent blues.

The first of the two brief acts traces the birth of the universe and the genesis of the Olympians, then settles down to three main stories: Zeus' pursuit of Io, the flirtation between Ares and Aphrodite, and Persephone's abduction to the [Underworld](#). The second act concentrates on the saga of Andromeda and Perseus.

The opening burst of images promises some excitement. Quickly shaken streamers blaze like lightning in primeval chaos, and the earth sails into view. Hope dims, though, when the titans are basically statues with gloved hands that gesture aimlessly.

The gods and humans soon appear, but they're not much more expressive. Too many of them look like dolls or skeletons on a stick. Visually, I kept hoping for imaginative surprises, but most that pop up don't work very well, like the huge faces of Zeus and, later, the Kraken. The most entertaining is a looming three-headed Cerberus.

That cool dog puppet underlines another problem with *Tales from Mount Olympus*: It undermines its narrative by easy jokes. Do we really want to laugh at these once sacred stories?

The actors, or most of them, don't get to voice their lines. The puppets are backed by a recorded narrative. Unfortunately, only Jac Alder's voice really sells the stories. The other readers lack polish and the right kind of theatricality.

The Andromeda story contains most of the highlights, although there are dull patches. The metamorphosis of Medusa's corpse into the flying horse Pegasus attains a brief majesty. The smaller-scaled Pegasus with Perseus on its back, though it provokes titters, is handsome as well.

PLAN YOUR LIFE: Through Nov. 28 at Theatre Three at the Quadrangle, 2800 Routh St. Runs 90 mins. \$25 to \$30. 214-871-3300, www.theatre3dallas.com.

