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Look What's Happened to Pixie DeCosta!

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Washed up star Pixie DeCosta (Paul Taylor aka Marjorie Keyes)

It's readily apparent that **Look What's Happened to Pixie DeCosta!** is intended as homage to the campy, creepy cinematic cult queer classic: "Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?" that featured icons Bette Davis and Joan Crawford. Following "Baby Jane's" plot nearly to the letter but amping up the queer excess factor, "Pixie" is a dizzy, hammy, delirious trip into the adult-candy world of shamelessly purple melodrama. It's just the panacea to chase them naughty blues away.

Not unlike the Hudsons, the Decosta Sisters began as child stars. As time passed, Margo's career took off while Pixie's lack of talent stymied hers. Falling from the balcony of their penthouse at

the Hollywood Ritz Arms Hotel, Margo was condemned to spend the rest of her life in a wheelchair, while sister Pixie drank and bed-hopped to drown bitterness and regret. Now they spend their days watching reruns of their films on television and sniping at each other.

Playwright and Director Bruce R. Coleman has fashioned a witty, deranged, spoof that will tickle you on several levels and make you wonder if the devil is nudging you in the ribs. Reveling in drag-insanity, goofy hardboiled banter, and a color palette combining the dayglo lunacy of Teletubbies with Pee-Wee's Playhouse (Thank you, David Walsh) "Pixie" pretty much pulls out all the stops, submerging us in a netherworld of co-dependency, where psychodrama is played out like Punch and Judy on a daily basis. Coleman's ingenious script not only exploits the icy, unblinking *noir* genre, it celebrates its inherent absurdity.

I will omit the play's final twist from this article but the casting of Paul Taylor (he also plays Redd Herring) as Pixie DeCosta herself surely must qualify as "an open secret". The first time we see Pixie with her Kabuki-like makeup and healthy crop of chest hair she looks like a cross between Medusa and Little Bo Peep. And, of course, in the grand tradition of drag caricature, there's just something about seeing a guy in the elaborate accoutrements of estrogen and bathos that's depraved and endlessly entertaining.

Whether playing a prissy martyr or a blowsy harridan, Taylor is spot on, digging deep for those huge emotions and often exploiting his angular knees and elbows like a double-jointed flamingo. Chad Peterson (an exceptionally gifted local talent) is cast here in supporting roles as Newsboy and Chip, the earnest and congenial apprentice handyman. You needn't be Sigmund Freud to track the subtext of a rangy, predatory drag-queen dolled up like a Black Widow and flirting with a sweet young Adonis. And believe me, Peterson and Taylor make the most of it. Those brawny gladiators had a better shot at fighting off the lions.

Phyllis Cicero as Miss Viddy Johnson, the DeCosta sister's long-suffering housekeeper is avid and versatile, with excellent comic timing. Ted Wold as the father of the DeCosta girls and Emory, their neighbor, goes to town as what they used to call "a confirmed bachelor." Whether he's dishing with the brave, saintly Margo DeCosta or stroking his white housecat he's busy and dizzy as a bee, and terribly amusing. Lisa Ann Haram plays both Ermengarde, the mother of Margo and Pixie, and Helena, a gossip columnist ala Hedda Hopper. She's got the tough-broad culture vulture down in spades.

Rick Espallat plays Moskovitz, a Hollywood movie mogul and Eddie, a downtrodden screenwriter and quintessential rhinestone in the rough. Steve Lovett plays a cop, O'Halleran, and Simpson, another movie mogul. It is a tribute to the flexibility and range of the cast that they carry off double roles with such finesse. Marla Jo Kelly and Didi Duron play Margo and Pixie as children, and the devil-doll/baby-tramp look in their song-and-dance number is simultaneously kitschy and disturbing -- which is to say perfect.

The creative team behind the staging of "Pixie:" costume designer Bruce R. Coleman, lighting designer Paul Arnold, sound designer Richard Frohlich and the previously noted set designer, David Walsh have balanced and orchestrated their contributions to recreate the kind of bizarre world you can only find in the grotesque creep-a-thons found on the silver screen (and apparently) the theatre. From the Cherry Red Jell-o spot used to summon Pixie's pathological attacks, to the mawkish, overblown music; from the beverages with non-sloshing liquids to the box of Rat Poison you could see from the back row; from Helena's ostentatious chapeau with more flowers than a botanical garden to Viddy's eye-popping dress and apron ensemble -- these four artisans have fashioned a hypnotic experience normally unavailable without the help of hallucinogenics.

*Performances through November 2nd at Theatre Three at the Quadrangle on Routh.
Call 214-871-3300 for more information or visit their website at
www.theatre3dallas.com*

Christopher Soden received his MFA in Poetry from Vermont College in 2005. He is a teacher, lecturer, actor, performer and playwright. In addition he writes film, theatre and literary critique. In his spare time he likes to read, cook, dine, do crossword puzzles, chill and nap.

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