

THEATER

VALLEY

Don't Monkey with Broadway. This showcase of showstoppers should be called “Don't Monkey with **Patti LuPone**,” who is in her fifth decade as a Broadway institution. Equally effective as a belter and a balladeer, she won Tonys for her scorching, searching turns as the formidable Mama Rose in *Gypsy* and the equally formidable Eva Peron in *Evita*, a character she helped birth. Her *Don't Monkey* repertoire reflects her remarkable registers, ranging from the desperate, defiant “Millwork,” which James Taylor wrote for the musical *Working*, to “Don't Cry for Me Argentina,” the implosive, explosive *Evita* mission statement. LuPone will dip into this catalog on November 4 at the State Theatre, an occasional harbor for Mandy Patinkin, her Che Guevara in the original *Evita* and her teammate during a 2011-12 Broadway concert series. Fair warning: Famously intolerant of cellphone addicts, LuPone once snatched a spectator's electronic weapon during a performance. Monkey around with your mobile (de)vice while she's onstage and she may shove you into a very harsh spotlight.

Then Athena. Four women play 14 females—historic, mythic, new—in a raw, rich exploration of heroism written by the performers. **Louise Howard**, a veteran actor and teacher, becomes an Army general in Afghanistan, an aspiring Wiccan and a Wonder Woman enemy. The Allentown Public Theatre production is especially relevant during a presidential campaign pitting a female former Secretary of State against an ex-Miss Universe impresario. (Nov. 18-20, Allentown Art Museum)

Aliens, Immigrants & Other Evildoers. **Jose Torres-Tama**—performance artist, playwright, provocative propagandist—creates a new category—Sci-Fi Latino Noir—to investigate why minorities—notably, Hispanics and other resident aliens—are feared, hated and misunderstood by Anglo Americans—even by people who couldn't work without their work. A classic mestizo, Torres-Tama was born in Ecuador, raised in New Jersey and has lived many years in the melting pot that is New Orleans, a laboratory for his solo plays *We Are Patriots with Dark Faces* and *\$Casinoamerica\$*. (Nov. 3-6, Touchstone Theatre)



Murdered to Death. A bumbling inspector, a melodramatic art dealer and a spinster sleuth entangle themselves while trying to untangle the mysterious death of a country-manoor baron in the 1930s. It's one of three Agatha Christie spoofs written by **Peter Gordon**, a reformed civil engineer from Yorkshire who founded a theater that stages new works to fund charities. (Nov. 3-6, Moravian College)

Crazy Glue. The makers of super glues promise that their products will mend pretty much everything. Ah, but can they stick broken hearts together? That's the unspoken question in Single Shoe Productions' *Crazy Glue*, a mostly pantomimed, largely exquisite portrait of a clownish couple struggling to get back their glee after a tragedy. **Bradley Wayne Smith** and **Filipa Tomas** play adventurous, inventive newlyweds who use her pregnant belly as a playground, perhaps training their unborn child for a slapstick career. A miscarriage changes their giddy swing dance to a melancholy ballet where he works overtime to relieve her depression, at one point dreaming of their romantic first meeting. They settle for a tougher, saner union, at one point flapping their clasped hands separately to simulate beating hearts removed from their chests. Performing at Touchstone Theatre, Smith was marvelously goofy and rubbery whether shaving with glue or removing a squid from his face during a daffy underwater escape. Tomas was marvelously muscular and nimble whether applying makeup with glue or jumping rope with her husband's intestines. Even their gibberish was musical; it resembled records spinning backwards. ■

— GEOFF GEHMAN

CITY

Grounded. “Impressive” describes Interact Theatre's production of George Brant's *Grounded*, a one-woman show directed by **Kathryn Macmillan**, starring **Kittson O'Neill** as The Pilot assigned to operate a fighter drone in the Middle East from the Las Vegas desert. O'Neill is brilliant as she takes us through The Pilot's mental states—delirious boredom when nothing happens to Zero Hour mania when she presses the deploy button. O'Neill is even better conveying The Pilot's slow psychological deconstruction while spending weeks tracking a terrorist leader. Her obsession affects her marriage and invites a nervous breakdown. She is ultimately unable to kill the terrorist because his daughter, a mirror image of her own child, awakens maternal instincts. An unsentimental male colleague is then forced to complete the execution.

How We Got On. The little theaters in The Drake on Hicks Street are attracting a fair amount of attention. The petite Louis Bluver Theatre hosted Azuka Theatre's presentation of *How We Got On* by Idris Goodwin, an '80s ode to teenage angst and rap. The Proscenium Theatre will present another world premier: **Douglas Williams'** *Sbit-beads* (February 22-March 12), about a once popular Manhattan bike shop that is losing its customers to a competing business across the street. In yet another world premier, Azuka will present Philadelphia playwright **Jacqueline Goldfinger's** *The Arsonists* (May 3-21), a Florida swamp-based story about a father and daughter inspired by the Greek tragedy, *Electra*. Azuka Theatre is the first theater company in Philadelphia (and the nation) to offer “Pay What You Decide” (PWYD) for the entire 2016-17 season.

Rizzo. When **Bruce Graham's** *Rizzo* premiered at Theater Exile last fall, reviews were good, but mixed. PTC's production of the play with the same cast (**Scott Greer** as Rizzo) was much improved, thanks to PTC dramaturge **Carrie Chapter**. The new production incorporated many references to the current presidential race. The PTC Rizzo was an even more divisive and controversial figure than his Theatre Exile counterpart. At the *Rizzo* press preview, Executive Producing Director **Sara Garonzik**, who will leave PTC after the 2017 season, introduced former Governor **Ed Rendell**, who reminded the audience that Rizzo was a product of his times and, like everyone, a combination of both good and bad traits. Philadelphia will never see another Frank Rizzo. Intensely charismatic on a personal level, the former mayor loved tyranny, police raids, and police wagons roaming the streets picking up anyone who looked suspicious or out of the ordinary.

This is the Week That Is. **Jen Childs**, co-founder and artistic director of 1812 Productions looks great in a fat suit, especially when she's playing Chris Christie. Childs has also invented her own character, Patsy, a South Philly stoop lady who dispenses bits of wisdom. Patsy illuminated 1812's 2016 version of its oft repeated show, *This is the Week That Is*, when she compared Hillary Clinton to “the Iggles” and Donald Trump to “scrapple.” The bi-partisan spoof no doubt upset political ideologues who want satire to reflect a particular bias. The non-stop laugh-a-thon starred **Scott Greer** and **Alex Bechtel** as Trump, and had skits on Vladimir Putin, climate change and Obamacare.

The Other Place. **Sharr White's** plays include *Stupid Kid*, *Sunlight* and *The Snow Geese*. The award-winning playwright's *The Other Place* premiered at The Walnut's Independence Studio on 3. The unsettling drama about a successful neurologist, Juliana, who battles a failing marriage and a crisis involving her daughter, holds yet another nightmare: the fact that she may have the same kind of brain tumor that killed her mother. Independence Studio 3 lightens up somewhat with the Irish Repertory Theatre of New York's adaptation of Dylan Thomas' *A Child's Christmas in Wales* (Nov. 15-Dec. 23). *The New York Times* writes: “Thomas's work is a cavalcade of imagery and sensation—the snowy sights, smells and sounds that marked the Christmases of his boyhood.” Figgy pudding for all! ■

— THOM NICKELS