

The Fab Marquee

NY Theatre is Fabulous!

« [Review- My Dead Mother Is Funnier Than You \(PlaidBird Productions\)](#)

Review- Elizabeth Rex (Nicu's Spoon)

The Fab Marquee review by *David Stallings*.

Nicu's Spoon Theatre Company is an inspiring group with a unique message all theatergoers in NYC should learn from. They pride themselves in working with talent of varying "colors, ages, genders, abilities, and talent." The diversity of the company is literally heart-warming as the casting always seems organic to the piece and never forced. That being said, I attended Nicu's Spoon's production of *Elizabeth Rex* by Timothy Findley this past week. The play fits into the mission perfectly as it explores gender roles in a surprising context. Unfortunately, the charismatic ensemble could not save the piece from its unfocused overwriting and inattentive direction.



STEPHANIE BARTON-FARCAS (Queen Elizabeth I) in Nicu Spoon's production of
"ELIZABETH REX"
April 2-19, 2008 at The Spoon Theatre (38 West 38th St, 5th Floor)
Photo Credit: Erica Parise Press Contact: Katie Rosin, Kampfire PR/ 917-438-9223

Findley's play has a fascinating premise. It set's us in the England of Elizabeth I and Shakespeare, and supposes what would happen if the two spent an evening together. The evening is filled with drama, as it is the night before Elizabeth executes her former lover, Essex. She chooses to find the company of Shakespeare and his players rather than dance the evening away with her obsequious court. What Elizabeth finds is a hostile bunch of actors who challenge her decision to execute her lover, claiming that Elizabeth has forgotten how to be a woman in assuming the role of a man. Her primary opposition is actor Ned Lowenscroft who plays all the female leads in Shakespeare's plays. He contrarily seems to have forgotten how to be a man in affecting always the part of a woman.

The world of the play is marvelous, ingenious, and delightful in concept and synopsis. In execution, Findley fails. From the moment Elizabeth enters the stage, the actors are blatantly rude to her. It is not the charming difference of class, but a violent seeming attack on her from the start. This immediately takes the viewer out of the piece. No one can understand why Elizabeth would allow such an attack. If the opposition only came from one character—Lowenscroft—then the play would make sense. Lowenscroft is dying and has nothing to lose. To the viewer's dismay, Findley chooses that everyone has a beef with the queen and makes little to no attempt to hide it. Shakespeare doesn't like her because she put his lover—according to this play anyway—in the tower. Beddoes doesn't like her seemingly because he doesn't like anyone. Jack Edmond doesn't like her because he is Irish and of course opens up that can of worms as well. After half an hour, the play turns into a screaming match that lasts for another two... When Findley finally focuses on the main argument between Elizabeth and Lowenscroft, he gets caught up in a conversation that seems extremely repetitive and never ending—not allowing a single statement to stand on its own.



STEPHANIE BARTON-FARCAS (*Queen Elizabeth I*) and **MICHAEL DIGIOIA** (*Ned Lowenscroft*) in Nicus Spoon's production of "**ELIZABETH REX**"
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The leading actors took their rich and layered historic roles and made the best of them. Stephanie Barton-Farcas delivers with her Elizabeth. She has created a woman who is believable as a queen, and yet we understand why she would be drinking ale in a barn. Ms. Farcas is genuine in her grief for Essex and her meltdown at the end of the piece is honest, vulnerable, and human. Ms. Farcas does everything right in a role that seems impossible to play. It is not her fault that Findley has the character talk in circles. She attempts to make sense of the writing with beautiful acting choices.

Likewise, Michael DiGiogia is a vision in the role of Ned Lowenscroft. From entrance to curtain, Mr. DiGiogia captures the stage and the heart of everyone in the room; then never lets go. His ability to play the diva-like character with genuine realism is commendable.

Kudos should also be given to Bill Galarno as the light of the play in his portrayal of aging actor Percy Gower, Merle Louise as the marvelously stoic Lady Henslow, Andrew Hutchenson as the

brooding Jack Edmund, and Melanie Horton for her subtlety as Lady Stanley. Fitting in with the mission of Nicu's Spoon, actor Sammy Mena plays the character of an abused bear taken in by Lowenscroft in a lovely moment of metaphor. Each time Mena entered as the bear, his honesty brought tears to my eyes. The way both Ms. Farcas and Mr. DiGiogia treated the bear proved to be the standout moments of the evening.

Director Joanne Zipay failed in unifying the text and making sense of the problem spots. She focused each character's argument in a bold way rather than allowing one argument to stand on its own. If she had directed her cast to be more honestly reverent to their queen and let their frustrations be a bubbling undercurrent, the play would have fared better. Attacking the play's arguments too early and with such force abandoned her actors and highlighted the textual faults.

The aesthetic of the set (John Trevellini), costumes (Rien Schlect), and lighting design (Steven Wolf) were all of the highest quality, truly unified in their world.

A play with several beautiful moments, I do not wish to leave unsaid that Findley's use of language is mesmerizing and his concept unique. The cast fares well and the company is commendable. I would be a bitter man indeed to not say that I leave Nicu's Spoon always learning a powerful lesson in humanity.

Nicu's Spoon presents
Timothy Findley's
Elizabeth Rex
April 2nd-19th, 2008
The Spoon Theatre

Tickets are \$18 and are now available online at www.theatermania.com or by calling 212-352-3101. Tickets may also be purchased in-person at the Spoon Theatre Box Office, 1 hour prior to showtime.

The Spoon Theatre | 38 West 38th St, 5th Floor | Manhattan.