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Quasimondo's Subversive 'Fight Night'

BY HARRY CHERKINIAN JUL. 23, 2020 10:04 A.M.

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2020 will be remembered years from now as the Age of Pandemic. But it will also stand out as “the year of *the* vote,” namely the upcoming November elections.

And, right on time, Quasimondo Physical Theatre has brought us *Fight Night*, a highly subversive, satirical takedown of the election process and just how we view and choose candidates. As part of its ongoing online readings of ensemble-based plays, THREADS, the boundary-pushing troupe adapted the piece for the screen to riveting effect. *Fight Night* was originally written and produced by the Belgian theater collective, Ontroerend Goed. But it translated well across the miles despite some technical issues, all a part of virtual viewing in today's times.

Like much of its current work, Quasimondo's readings are audience interactive, i.e. “immersive theater.” Real time voting was a major part of the production's trajectory and actually determined which of the five candidates moved forward or were eliminated. Polling results were immediate. The actors had to adjust quickly based on how the audience voted and what lines they then had to read. And the audience became just as much a part of the election process, if not more so, than the numbered candidates.

The five candidates were reduced to numbers, which worked perfectly for the 55-minute production as the audience immediately voted on their favorite candidate as soon as *Fight Night* got underway. The point is well taken; we're judging based on looks. But that all changed as alliances were built and broken, and even the moderator/host changed the rules into the process.

Fight Night is less about the actual candidates and more about us, the voters. The polling questions become more vague, more absurd as the “fight” wears on. How to choose among three listings of the same word, “disagree”? But the

audience did—61 percent choose the second listing. And eventually, as one candidate emerges as the “winner,” audience members were asked to turn on video screens, exposing themselves, literally and figuratively.

Quasimondo moderator and *FN* host Jeffrey Mosser continues to be the guiding force in these readings and kept *Fight Night* moving, adapting well to some of the glitches (i.e. distorted and muted mics, awkward pauses). Among the five candidates, Selena Milewski was a standout as a confident, polished contender, coming across as highly believable and at times comical given the growing number ludicrous responses all said seriously. (Milewski was also a delight in to watch in Quasimondo's recent *Chekhov Lizardbrain*).

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By show's end, it didn't matter who won, who lost. But it certainly made us, the “voters,” the audience think about how we vote and why we vote the way we do. As one candidate says—ironically—after being eliminated, “the only poll that really counts is the next election.” How timely—and oh, so true!

To learn more about Quasimondo's free, monthly THREADS series—Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m., CST—visit: www.Quasimondo.org. Upcoming virtual content can be found at: Quasimondo.org/QTV.

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Harry Cherkinian is an award-winning writer and reviewer in the arts and entertainment field, specializing in music and theater.

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