



### **Regional Reviews: *Fast Company***

Theater Mu

Review by Arthur Dorman

Director Brian Balcom has a masterful touch with dense scripts, rapid-paced banter, and fast-moving action, as evidenced by a string of successful outings at Gremlin (*Samuel J. and K*, *Ideation*, *Don't Dress for Dinner* among them) and other local theaters. Those skills keep *Fast Company* galloping along at a giddy pace, even when there is, at one juncture, a six-month gap in the action. He is able to depict a family whose members are ready to set the others adrift on a rubber raft in a sea of sharks, yet still create an aura of family ties that never completely vanish.



### **The power of family at the forefront of Theater Mu's "*Fast Company*"**

By Adrian Daniel Schramm

November 22, 2019

It has been described as a "great con" and "silly fun" by the City Pages – but what we discovered was much more than classic con tricks: A story of how our relationships, and our unwavering loyalties to them shape our lives – for better and for worse. Through Theater Mu's always-reliable storytelling we're reminded here simply of the power a good story, and good characters, can have. This is just the kind of escape we look for on a cold Wednesday night.



### **'Vietgone' is a surprising refugee comedy at American Stage**

By Maggie Duffy

Published Oct. 10

A story about refugees falling in love after terrible loss doesn't sound like the premise of a comedy, but it also sounds familiar. Yet, *Vietgone*, Qui Nguyen's play about how his parents met in America after fleeing war-torn Vietnam, is both hilarious and refreshingly original. And richly nuanced.



### **Theater Review: Powerful '*Vietgone*' uses humor to get you thinking at American Stage**

By [Jay Handelman](#)

Posted Oct 14, 2019

It's safe to say we haven't seen anything quite like it in our part of Florida, nor have we seen a stage filled with Asian-American actors. Director Brian Balcom's involving production will likely make you eager for more... Balcom keeps the tone just right so that we are more open to the serious over- and undertones and the power of lyrics that cut deep while speaking hard but necessary truths.



**Regional Reviews: Samuel J. and K.**

Gremlin Theatre

Review by Arthur Dorman

Smart, an affiliate writer with the Minneapolis-based Playwrights' Center, has had two other plays on local stages in the past twelve months. I found *Samuel J. and K.* to be the most engaging of the three, owing to the sparkling dialogue, the outstanding performances, and Brian Balcom's crisp direction that keeps these two actors in an almost constant pattern of circling around one another, starting out with their frisky competition on the basketball court.

**PIONEER PRESS**  
TwinCities.com

**Review: Gremlin's gripping 'Ideation' confronts darkly comic quandaries**

By ROB HUBBARD PUBLISHED: July 7, 2018

"Ideation" is 100 minutes of heated give, take and twists that left me feeling mentally exhausted as I left the theater, but also convinced that I'd experienced a very important play. "Ideation" asks us to examine our trust in systems, leaders and our own judgment. And Gremlin Theatre's tightly coiled production makes it unsettlingly realistic, each performance bearing a truthful ring. Under Brian Balcom's snappily paced direction, the cast skillfully takes us into a daunting labyrinth of ethical quandaries, their confidence eroding and fear mounting as we go.

<https://www.twincities.com/2018/07/07/review-gremlins-gripping-ideation-confronts-darkly-comic-quandaries/>



**REVIEW: It's not just another day at the office in Gremlin Theatre's darkly comic "Ideation."**

By LISA BROCK JULY 9, 2018

Gremlin gives this darkly comic piece a sharply drawn production that demonstrates all too clearly how quickly paranoia can be conjured out of rapidly shifting perspectives and how easily a whiteboard and an algebraic formula can paper over a moral abyss. Loeb's script occasionally lapses into self-indulgence as one scenario after another is lobbed into the air, but director Brian Balcom does an excellent job of juggling disparate plotlines and keeping the action on track.

<http://www.startribune.com/death-is-the-first-order-of-business-in-the-dark-comedy-ideation/487682991/>

**Twin Cities Arts Reader**

Arts and lifestyles. Incisive. Insightful. Exciting. Exquisite.

**REVIEW: Lovely Tangles In Don't Dress For Dinner (Gremlin)**

by Bev Wolfe - July 11, 2017

French bedroom farce is in fine form in Gremlin Theatre's production of *Don't Dress for Dinner*. French playwright Marc Camoletti wrote the original play, which was presented using Robin Hawdon's English adaptation. *Don't Dress for Dinner* was Gremlin's very first production all the way back in 1998, and was selected as the first for the company's new permanent home in Vandalia Tower. Brian Balcom's direction this comedy about infidelity and mistaken identity is flush with impeccable timing.

<https://twincitiesarts.com/2017/07/11/review-dont-dress-for-dinner-gremlin/>



## Gremlin Theatre Opens Their New St. Paul Performance Space with **DON'T DRESS FOR DINNER**

by Jill Schafer Jul. 21, 2017

Under the crisp direction of Brian Balcom, this fantastic cast plunges head-first into the comedy, sometimes literally, as things get pretty physical at times, leading the characters into... compromising positions.

<https://www.broadwayworld.com/minneapolis/article/BWW-Review-Gremlin-Theatre>

## CHICAGO SUN★TIMES

### “TEN” earns its rating at The Gift Theatre

Hedy Weiss 01/05/2016, 12:29am

Jenny Davis' haunting “Last Stop” delves intriguingly into the whole issue of mortality in a time-and-place-warped tale of ordinary commuters who board and depart a subway car with a public address system that is frustratingly muffled and incomprehensible... The existential mystery of it all is handled ideally, with a cast of seven expertly directed by Brian Balcom.

<http://chicago.suntimes.com/entertainment/ten-earns-its-rating-at-the-gift-theatre/>



### Farce, frivolity add up to fun in 'Absolute Turkey'

LISA BROCK, May 30, 2012

...Indeed, there's not a weak performance in director Brian Balcom's fine ensemble. Farce is essentially the triumph of style over substance and Balcom brings plenty of style. "An Absolute Turkey" proceeds at the breakneck pace needed to keep its house-of-cards plot from collapsing, with clever timing that keeps the comedy frothy.

<http://www.startribune.com/entertainment/stageandarts/154491505.html>



### Top ten plays of 2011

By Jay Gabler, December 29, 2011

**6. The Folly of Crowds, Clay Sushi Productions.** The surprise of the year. With a script by Mat Smart and direction by Brian Balcom, I wasn't surprised that I enjoyed this Fringe show—but I was surprised at how much great acting, drama, suspense, and genuine heart were packed in there along with the yuks and the yucks. As dozens of crummy movies demonstrate each year, romantic comedy is a delicate dish, and this creative company served it up just right.

<http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/top-ten-plays-of-2011/>

 **StarTribune** **See You Next Tuesday**  
by ROHAN PRESTON, August 12, 2010

Steve Moulds' break-up comedy offers strong acting by a cast with palpable chemistry, and simple but elegant direction by Brian Balcom.

<http://www.startribune.com/entertainment/onstage/100384189.html>

TWIN CITIES  
**DAILY PLANET** **"See You Next Tuesday": That spells trouble**  
by Jay Gabler, August 11, 2010  
LOCAL NEWS FOR GLOBAL CITIZENS

...The perfectly cast quartet have crackerjack comic timing, and they romp through the play's lighter scenes like bears jumping in puddles of honey. Moulds has an acute sense for the little burrs that get in people's saddles, including the one that inspired the play's title and Balcom keeps the show light on its feet—the punch lines are all the funnier because they're delivered as lines, not punches.

<http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/blog/jay-gabler/see-you-next-tuesday-spells-trouble>

**PIONEER PRESS** **Best Of 2009 - Theater**  
TwinCities.com By Dominic P. Papatola, 12/28/2009

**NO. 6: "SOME GIRL(S)," WALKING SHADOW THEATRE COMPANY**

When you can like a play without liking the main character, both the playwright and the producing company have done something extraordinary. ...Under director Brian Balcom and on Steve's Kath's mood-perfect set, the Walking Shadow company delivered a smooth, solid and unflinching take on the darker side of relationships that left a tinny taste in audience mouths.

<http://www.twincities.com/2009/12/26/best-of-2009-theater-poor-economy-didnt-strap-a-season-rich-in-strong-productions/>

**'Some Girl(s)' has sharp staging, creepy characters**

By Dominic P. Papatola, 11/23/2009

...It's a good and toothsome script, but the trick lies in figuring out how to play Guy and his women in such a way as to maintain the audience's attention without making them want to barf in utter revulsion. With a mix of light and dark humor, director Brian Balcom achieves this balance, centering it on Clarence Wethern's portrayal of Guy.

<http://www.twincities.com/2009/11/22/theater-review-some-girls-has-sharp-staging-creepy-characters/>

## **CITY PAGES** Playwright Neil LaBute orchestrates methodical takedown of his own gender

By Quinton Skinner, Nov 25 2009

...All this works because of the strength of the cast, as well as Brian Balcom's spirited and text-respecting direction. You almost wish it didn't, because LaBute's work is like a perversely maladjusted acquaintance: It's beside the point to judge him, and equally wrongheaded to deny his squishy and intermittent power to fascinate. And if it all makes you feel better about yourself, go with it—we all deserve the slack. Except, perhaps, for Guy.

<http://www.citypages.com/2009-11-25/arts/some-girls-hones-in-on-lonesome-men/>

## **StarTribune** Review: Careless, calloused, perhaps clueless

By ROHAN PRESTON, November 25, 2009

The performers make the subtext of the play palpable. With director Balcom, they evince a clear understanding of the strength that LaBute has manifested in plays such as "Fat Pig" and "bash." But the playwright's limitations are also clear. His female characters could be far better written. These women are all carriers of wounds -- wounds so tender that all it takes to re-open them is for an unethical cad with whom they were once involved to show up to re-live the same depressing scene again and again.

<http://www.startribune.com/entertainment/onstage/71967327.html>



## **THEATER | Walking Shadow slides "Some Girl(s)" down the razor blade of life**

By Jay Gabler, November 23, 2009

Wethern could have played his character as a slick asshole, but under the wise direction of Brian Balcom, he doesn't: he comes across as a nice guy who just can't quite figure out how he keeps managing to hurt people so badly.

Still, LaBute's best work—and *Some Girl(s)* is surely the best of his plays with which I'm familiar—resonates because everyone's been hurt, everyone's hurt someone else, and no one can really be positive that it won't happen again. In the hands of Balcom and his cast, LaBute's play is appropriately chilly but also heartbreakingly human. It's an exceptionally powerful show.

<http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/theater-walking-shadow-slides-some-girls-down-razor-blade-life/>

## **CITY PAGES** SAM SHEPARD'S FOOL FOR LOVE DEFINES "DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP"

BY QUINTON SKINNER, DECEMBER 10, 2008

Stories of forbidden love make up at least a vertebra or two in the spine of works for the stage, for the obvious reason that raging, unbridled passion lends itself to a ripping drama. Sam Shepard's *Fool for Love* raises the stakes by tearing through a very particular taboo, and this Brian Balcom-directed Gremlin Theatre production captures a great deal of its intensity, desperation, and outright weirdness.

<http://www.citypages.com/arts/sam-shepards-fool-for-love-defines-dysfunctional-relationship-6683443>

 **Theater review: 'Marmalade' is chilly, but worth a look**  
By Graydon Royce - November 27, 2007 - 7:06 PM

...In Walking Shadow's production, director Brian Balcom keeps Jaime Kleiman's Lucy away from the sappy baby talk that could send a viewer shrieking into the night. Patrick Kozicky's Larry lapses a bit more into infantilism, but overall, one senses that Balcom agrees with Haidle's instinct for adult sensibility.

<http://www.startribune.com/entertainment/onstage/11921851.html>

TWIN CITIES  
 **Theater review: A pleasantly prickly play date with 'Mr. Marmalade'**  
BY JAY GABLER - November 27, 2007  
LOCAL NEWS FOR GLOBAL CITIZENS

On paper, the scenario walks a thin line between portent and preciousness. On the Red Eye Theater stage, however, the production is light-footed and richly entertaining. By emphasizing the mercurial capriciousness of Lucy's fantasy life, director Brian Balcom and his cast capture a spirit of childish innocence without indulging in mawkish sentiment.

<http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/article/2007/11/27/theater-review-pleasantly-prickly-play-date-mrmarmalade.html>

 **HOW TO CHEAT**  
By Claude Peck

As infidelity plays go, this one is at least heartfelt, well-written and ably acted. Playwright Alan Berks lucked out with the casting, as Emily Gunyou and Randy Reyes bring the brittle two-hander to life. The dialogue is of the liberal, clipped, slightly upper-crusty variety, as married Meredith meets Luis in a storage room while a party goes on elsewhere in a big house. They circle each other, then hook up, then deal with the fallout of their actions. The serious themes about happiness, regret, faithfulness, sex and cheating are leavened with enough laugh lines to keep it all from becoming a bit too much.

<http://www.startribune.com/121/story/597536.html>