



"Life on Stage"

By Regina Klein

'Grand Delusion' Appears at The Lost Studio

What happens when an energetic troupe led by former New York University's experimental theatre wing collaborators, Brad Raider and James Roday, take on the foibles of bumbling leaders in pre-war 1914? It's an evening of Monty Python-meets-Firesign-Theatre-laced irreverence. Red Dog Squadron's staging of David Rock's black comedy, "Grand Delusion," is clever and as refreshing as it is timely. Though, in general, this reviewer appreciates the genre (and especially did back in the days when insightful, goofball sketches had air time), it seemed clear that Rumbledorf, General Fafou, and the others were having most of the fun.

Most likely, a pun on Jean Renoir's 1937 film, "La Grande Illusion," (which examines Europe and the political and social division leading to war), Rock's work captures the absurdity of chaotic, often arbitrary events that form a tragic chapter in world history. In "Grand Delusion," Red Dog Squadron Theatre Company does show that it has the tools to successfully bring a "period piece" of sorts to life.

There is much to admire, from solid stage craft, including dead-on sound cues, to the well-developed characters and the capable actors who play them. Larry Biederman directs the cast that features Kurt Fuller (Anger Management, Scary Movie) as Kaiser Wilhelm, Xander Berkeley (George Mason on 24) as Czar Nicholas, Timothy Omundson (Judging Amy, Psych) as the Austrian foreign minister Rumbledorf, Brad Raider as Podnov, Eric Stonestreet as General Fafou, and Amanda Detmer as Venetia.

As an aside, while the generals gradually faded after the play did, the poster art did not. This "grand illusion," of the production is a colorful montage of images depicting the symbol's and characters of war, visually embodies the intentions and spirit of Rock's play.

Performances of "Grand Delusion" are this Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. Tickets: \$20.

The Lost Studio is located at 130 South La Brea Avenue (1-1/2 blocks south of Beverly Boulevard between 1st and 2nd) in Los Angeles. (323) 960-4441 or www.plays411/granddelusion