



## Choke coughs up balanced mix of laughs and tears

### theatre review

#### Choke

*Runs until 18 November*  
 Written by Cathleen Rootsart  
 Directed by Marianne Copithorn  
 Starring Chris Bullough, Kevin Corey,  
 and Maralyn Ryan  
 Roxy Theatre (10708 124 Street)

RYAN KENNY  
 Arts & Entertainment Writer

The first light of the evening is a lighter sparking up a joint. The main lights come up, and a lanky, dorky man with a goatee is in the midst of his best impersonation of a sexy female dancer. The house erupts and stays laughing for the next ten minutes. If the play goes

on like this, it'll be like an episode of *Cheech and Chong* with a couple of modern-day video game junkies.

But it doesn't. In fact, a number of later scenes had many in the crowd shedding tears of sadness, not laughter.

In *Choke*, Dylan (Kevin Corey) and Greg (Chris Bullough) are brothers without too many worries. Dylan is an uneducated and unemployed 20-something still living at home, dreaming of becoming an astrologist but too comfortable smoking up and playing Xbox while his mom takes care of everything else. Greg is a perpetually engaged 15-year Superstore veteran who spends just as much time at his mother's house as he does at his own.

Their widowed mother Catherine (Maralyn Ryan), a somewhat overweight smoker, is only too happy to oblige her boys, making all of their meals and doing the laundry. However, the tables are turned on Catherine's sons when she suffers an unexpected stroke, leaving them as her caretakers.

The conflict of emotions created by the situation is brilliantly portrayed through Corey's performance as Dylan. The character is complex: immature yet caring, lazy yet passionate.

Verbalized emails to his online girlfriend, Mei Lee, reveal his most personal feelings. It's an original convention that's true to the character, more so than a series of monologues would have been. The role is a challenging one, but Corey nails it, and truly connects his character

with the audience.

On the other hand, Bullough's Greg is less successful, though this isn't simply the actor's fault, as it's a combination of writing, directing, and acting that make his performance a tad overdone. "Whatever!" is his all-too-common response for Greg's irrational and selfish decisions. His arms flail as he marches around the stage yelling, but his anger is unconvincing at times. As a whole however, the cast effectively brings the play to life.

One unique aspect of the production that immersed the audience in the action was the use of scents. Whenever the guys lit up, the potent smell of weed filled the room. When they quickly tried to cover the smell up with incense before their mom got home, this

new odour took over.

Also adding to the realism of the piece was the set design. Complete with foyer, kitchen, living room, dining room, and working appliances, it was easy for the audience to become completely wrapped up in the characters' reality.

In the end, Cathleen Rootsart's play is about the duality of life. When it seems to be going great, there's always a new challenge ahead to knock you down a notch, and when you've been knocked down as low as you can go, there's always room for a laugh or two.

While it could have been tightened up a bit (the show runs for two and a half hours), *Choke* is a bittersweet play that anyone can relate to and everyone can enjoy.

## The Locust an unsettling swarm

The San Diego quartet have strange ideas to match their twisted punk music

### music preview

#### The Locust

*With Despised Icon and Child Abuse*  
 Tuesday, 6 November at 8pm  
 Avenue Skatepark

CHARLIE CRITTENDEN  
 Arts & Entertainment Writer

The Locust are weird. Like, really weird. Their music punishes your cochlea, and ditches in the morning without even leaving a note. It's destructively appealing if you're in a sweaty, thrashy kind of mood. Otherwise, it just hurts. Any attempted label—beyond "fucking loud"—wouldn't stick to their skin-tight nylon suits, and would likely fall off in sheer fright. That said, drummer Gabe Serbian seems tired of being written off as useless noise.

"The reaction I get is sort of [a] rash that grows downwards from the inside center of my throat to my sternum," he explained via email. "Then, the itchy rash symptom starts to tickle my heart with a great overwhelming sensation that often leaves me tired and bored."

The band, originally from San Diego, describes itself as experimental punk: many of their songs barely break the

one-minute mark in length. It's full of split-second starts and stops, and the band usually performs in strange, tight-fitting costumes. When prodded about their performance getups, Serbian gives another strange answer.

**"To destroy what you create, you must line every thought with a calculated amount of delicious poison for the tiny forms of life that swarm around your body."**

GABE SERBIAN  
 THE LOCUST DRUMMER

"We wear our uniforms so that we can achieve complete control and focus through a process which is similar to photosynthesis," he says. "[The suits] also maintain and regulate our temperature—although the power cells have been malfunctioning lately."

Photosynthesis might be going on with the band, but a vegetative state

seems to be the outcome, judging by the joyous and complete incoherency of the band's responses.

But then again, they've never been known for elaborating clearly on the points they make. The Locust's chief screamer, Justin Pearson, once said, "I just want to destroy music in general," and Serbian is happy to share his own thoughts of the matter.

"To destroy what you create, you must line every thought with a calculated amount of delicious poison for the tiny forms of life that swarm around your body," he says. "A sandwich artist creates a masterpiece, and you fuck it with your mouth—or your keyboard in this case."

Despite this illicit sandwich activity, Serbian doesn't seem to be all that angry. Although things don't always go his way—according to Serbian, the band only named their latest album *New Erections* because they lost a bet—he's got his band's place in the music industry pegged.

"[We're] Sky Dancers, my friend. Sky Dancers."

Any unsightliness is hidden by their sensual attire, so your eyes shouldn't be too offended if see them live—but you might want to bring some band-aids for your ears.

