THEATER REVIEW
RenFaire: A Fistful of Ducats
Playwright: Matt Engle
At: Factory Theater at Prep
Thrs, 3502 N. Elston Ave.
Tickets: 866-813-6211
www.thefactorytheater.com; $20
Runs through: Sept. 2

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

On one side, we have a Renaissance Faire—its mission, to provide citizens stressed by modern
life an escape to the magic of a mythical kingdom
where gulliancy and courtesy reign. On the other,
we have a Wild West show celebrating the racism,
sexism, hypocrisy, violence, inhumanity and and testosterone-fueled manifest destiny that made
our country what it is today. This is how Matt Engle’s slatpuck comedy draws the lines, anyway.

His plot is likewise simplistic: Bill Pickens, jingoistic promoter of cowbuy culture, wants to
open a water-park on land currently occupied by
hippie-ish Dave Wheeling’s earstwhile-Avalon with
its Eurocentric (!) ambiance. Pickens and his
hucksters—a collection of horses, opera stock
actors—conspire to seize the property touting on
the brink of foreclosure. Before these villains get their comeuppance, however, we are intro-
duced to cavaler Here (that’s his NAME—hon-
est!) and his newly-born cav-tan, Andy. Their

ally include a pair of motley-clad clowns who recite film dialogue in period verse (“Raging Bull” is their favorite), a jester-like King Hen-
ry VIII, and assorted musicians and vending
merchants, one of whom moonlights as the Faire’s Apothecary-Feepool.

This live-action cartoon serves up the obliga-
tory slatpuck shenanigans, bawdy jests, intri-
cate swordplay, secret lovers, saloon brawls, and
Broadway-styled song-and-dance numbers. We are
also rendered privy to aviators in hairy-sleezer
gloveshirt (think Gabby Hayes) and sly bystand by
a Polish immigrant Miss Kitty, with additional
running gags supplied by, among other quirks,
Her’s propensity for accidentally injuring his
fight-partners, and a double-agentดอก swears.
which switches from a faux English accent to an equal-
ly faux Texas drawl as his allegiances shift.

The 80 minutes required for this Factory The-
atre revival to reach its conclusion is utilized
more efficiently than its inimic in 2007. The
swiftly-paced action now permits the occasional
quiet moment, allowing us to savour the artistry
necessary to keep this kind of madcap mayhem
from spilling out of control. Nowhere is this
more evident than in the final showdown, trig-
ergged by a blades vs. bullets duel, then quickly
escalating to a full-card melee in which fantasy
champions of all nationalities—Kipling, History
Patties, Penguins—join in the fracas, rallied by
the martial music of RenFaire-muse Jethro Tull. See
if this doesn’t have you cheering, whether a
“huzzah” or a “yee-haw” (or wondering what
they put in the mead, at least).

Joffrey seeks choreographers of color for award

The Joffrey Academy of Dance—the official
school of The Joffrey Ballet—has announced
a national call for artists to submit applica-
tions for the Joffrey’s Third Annual Choreog-
raphers of Color Award.

The deadline for application is Sept. 1; win-
ers will be notified by Oct. 1. Three selected
choreographers will be given a minimum of
30 rehearsal hours to set their pieces with the
Joffrey Academy trainees. Each winning
choreographer will also receive a $2,500
stipend and an opportunity to work directly with
Joffrey Academy artistic directors Alexei
Krenev and Anna Reznik.

To apply, interested choreographers must
submit the following by mail or email to
choreographersofcolor@joffrey.org: a DVD or
YouTube link with an excerpt of their choreo-
graphy (maximum: five minutes) and a brief
written description; a letter of intent describ-
ing their interest in the competition and the
kind of work they will create; a headshot and
curriculum vitae with three references; and,a
general application, which can be found on-
line at www.joffrey.org/cacf. There is no sub-
mission fee.

Materials can also be mailed to The Joffrey
Ballet, Attn: Choreographers of Color Compe-
tition Selection Committee, 10 E. Randolph
St., Chicago, IL, 60601.

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likely discovery of a massive stash of gold in
the second half.

But despite the dramaturgical deficiencies
of the play, Hytner and his cast and crew of
the National’s Timon of Athens show time
and again how the work is riveting enough to
be intimidating. In fact, Tymon’s servants are repeatedly
overwhelmed by their former friends in business
government. Who am I? They’re not averse to
leaking money.

Hytner’s pitch comes with a massive produc-
ion with a large cast led by out actor Simon Russell
Bevere (who many critics acclaim as Britain’s
greatest living stage actor) powerfully tak-
ing on the title role. Other standouts include
Hilary McAsa as the bitter philosopher Ape-
montus, Deborah Findlay as Timon’s tender-
switched loyal steward Faustus and the greedy
artistic tweeces of Nick Sampson as a Poet
and Penny Layden as a Painter. Although
Timon of Athens may not fully satisfy over-
all as a drama, it contains manycomponents that feel both timeless and hot-off-the-press.

‘Steamwerkz the Musical’ through Aug. 31
The Monroe Theatre, 4600 N. Broadway. will present Steamwerkz the Musical Fridays
through Aug. 31 at 10 p.m.

The comedy-musical is about a “wide-eyed gay boy [who] comes to Chicago looking for
love in all the wrong places when he stumbled on a popular bathroom Steamwerkz,”
according to a press release.

Tickets are $15-70; visit www.thesteamnny-
ance.com or call 773-945-1000 (4665).

Debbie Reynolds at Drury Sept. 17-18
Hollywood entertainer Debbie Reynolds will perform in a limited engagement at Drury Lane
Theatre, 100 Drury Lane, Oakbrook Ter-
race, on Monday, Sept. 17, at 1:30 p.m.
and 7:30 p.m. and Tuesday, Sept. 18, at 3:30 p.m.
Tickets are $55 each performance. Lunch
and dinner packages are $70-74. For reserva-
tions, call the Drury Lane Box office at $30-
530-0111 or call Ticketmaster at 312-559-
2222, or visit www.ticketmaster.com or

Debbie Reynolds. PR photo
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