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Hoover: A Love Story is the show that puts the stormy romance between America's Top Cop J. Edgar Hoover and his assistant/protégé Clyde Tolson on stage in all its steamy, torrid glory. It's got everything: gunned-down gangsters (John Dillinger, Pretty Boy Floyd, et al); cloak-and-dagger intrigue; conspiracy theories linking the Mob to both Kennedy assassinations; a stunning Red Baiting tableau vivant featuring Joe McCarthy, Roy Cohn, and Richard Nixon parading around Hoover like Ziegfeld showgirls whilst chanting "Are you now or have you ever been?"; Ginger Rogers' mother; and a grand climactic eleven o'clock number in which Hoover himself sings "My Way" in a full-length evening gown. What's not to love?

This is, evidently, satire-very over-the-top satire, which is why it's so much fun; harmless and yet startlingly resonant as it shoots down familiar political targets one after another. Nothing is sacred in Paul Wells' deliberately racy and outrageous treatment of the life and loves of the not-at-all-beloved Chief G-Man; ditto Rick Vorndran's endlessly witty stylized staging, which has FDR crawling to his desk on his knees to simulate a wheelchair and includes more than one hilarious simulated sex scene between Hoover and Tolson, both fully clothed in 3-piece suits, banging and spanking away at one another with terrifying glee.

Wells and Vorndran omit no tasteless sexual pun or vulgar sight gag in their effort to amuse us at the expense of a man whose clout was shockingly enormous. Hoover: A Love Story asks how the hypocrites always seem to wind up on top; it's a treacherous melodramatic farce about the excessively rich and powerful looking after their own at the expense of everybody else, and thus sadly timely. Only one historical personage-President Harry Truman-comes off as remotely statesmanlike; everyone else, from Nixon to Roosevelt and back again, is presented as only too ready to compromise integrity in the name of self-interest. Historical purists will quibble over the liberties that Wells may be taking with facts here, but aficionados of good old-fashioned American pamphleteering are going to recognize the genuine article in this cheerfully venomous assault on cherished manners and institutions.

Wells' script saunters through nearly fifty years of American history with the faux solemnity of a '50s B-movie bodice ripper; Vorndran's direction tempers the thing with a gallery of exquisitely-timed and -realized effects that turn Hoover into Grade-A avant-garde downtown theatre. A superlative cast brings it all to life, headed by Stephen Cabral's nasty, neurotic J. Edgar and Rob Brown's worshipful, vaguely masochistic Clyde, and including the astoundingly versatile Johanna Bon, Stephanie Bush, James Ferazzi, Jennifer Gill, and David Skigen, among them playing what feels like a hundred different roles, everything and everybody from the windshield wipers of a Washington, D.C. taxi cab to a prematurely senile Ronald Reagan at the House Un-American Activities Committee. Skigen and Ferazzi come close to stopping the show as, respectively, Roosevelt and Nixon (these two are uncanny mimics as well as fine comic actors); Bon and Bush have fun as the women in Hoover's life, respectively, Lela Rogers and his mother. Gill gets the most dangerous moment, in Jackie Kennedy's signature pink suit and pillbox hat, in the recreation of an assassination that Wells says Hoover helped engineer in a bad-taste moment that totally works in this context.

Witty costumes by Claudia Cahill make an important contribution, too, with my personal favorite being Lela Rogers' grotesque party dress, made of the same tacky floral print fabric as Mama Hoover's apron.

Don't expect literal truth, naturally; do expect something like catharsis, though, from laughing so hard. And there may be some food for thought buried in all this stuff as well...