



This is Anthony Byrnes Opening the Curtain on LA Theater for KCRW.

If you're a lover of muscular playwriting, great acting and Los Angeles - you need to spend next Sunday with Murray Mednick.

Well not with Mr. Mednick himself but his remarkable 6 play cycle "The Gary Plays." Open Fist Theatre Company has teamed up with Mr. Mednick and director Guy Zimmerman to bring all 6 plays to the stage. So you're seeing 6 plays in a single day. It's a Los Angeles marathon of sorts.

The Gary of the plays is Gary Bean and as many have noted he's a sort of Los Angeles everyman: he's an out of work actor. What could be more fitting for a play about LA? The central crisis that haunts Gary is the death of his son Danny Boy. Danny was killed somewhat mysteriously and despite being something of an addict and mostly homeless himself - Gary is committed to avenging his death.

That proves to not be quite as easy as it might seem. Along the way Gary has to contend with the voices in his head, ex-wives, junkies, a dying mother, the angel of death, and more than a couple existential and philosophical crisis. All of this is brought to life through the vivid, aggressive language of Mr. Mednick.

Mr. Mednick is something of perennial ur-playwright of Los Angeles. While he traces his roots back to New York and his fellow playwrights Sam Shepard and Maria Irene Fornes, it's in Los Angeles with his Padua Playwrights that Mr. Mednick has made his mark.

You can recognize a Mednick play almost instantly through not only it's daring use of language but also through the visceral acting. Mr. Mednick's words attract great actors, not pretty-boy showcase actors here to make their big break - but quirky actors, actors who have secrets, actors you might choose avoid late at night in a dark alley. This Open Fist production is no exception - it's been wonderfully cast.

What's extraordinary about the Open Fist productions is the design work. Usually Mr. Mednick's plays survive on words and acting alone. That's enough. But here the productions are surrounded by a remarkable score, courtesy of designer John Zalewski, and an almost constant videoscape by projection designer Hana S. Kim. They provide more than just a backdrop for Gary's journey through the city but also a remarkable restrained but powerful visual world that echoes without overpowering Mr. Mednick's words.

"The Gary Plays" are not for the faint of heart. If you see them in a single day, as you can next Sunday, you're committing to spending a day inside a playwright's troubled mind; experiencing the ideas and characters as they eddy and flow through his consciousness. At the end of it you'll have a sense of Mr. Mednick's gifts and also a sense for what it means to think and write about Los Angeles. You might feel what it would be like to walk from the Valley to the sea or to wake up thinking of Kant or Buber after sleeping under the 405.