

THE Arts

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CRITICS



Oliver Dalzell

A scene from "The Fortune Teller," a morality tale for grown-ups. Seven men have their fortunes told. The prediction each time is grisly death.

Seven Deadly Sins for Seven Macabre Marionettes

It looks like a giant wooden dollhouse. Its front door creaks open to reveal a portly alligator: a lawyer named Silas Leech who narrates in sinuous, plummy tones the story of

seven men gathered to hear the reading of a will. Occasionally he mispronounces a word: "tawed" for "thawed," "myoptic" for "myopic." Is it intentional? So acute is the eye for detail in "The Fortune Teller," the puppet play by Erik Sanko at the Here Arts Center, that it almost seems intentional.

Don't bring the kids. This is a morality fable for grown-ups, evoking the familiar idioms of Edward Gorey and Tim Burton in a style you might term Victorian ghastly.

The seven men, grotesque and decadent, represent the seven deadly sins; each must hear his future forecast by a mysterious Fortune Teller, who predicts grisly deaths for all. (Gluttony, a fat, smelly cook, chokes to death.) These futures are enacted in the side wings of the set, a regular wunderkammer that keeps opening up to reveal new sets and images, little Victorian dioramas.

"The Fortune Teller" is thickly encrusted in dark music: Mr. Sanko, a downtown musician, wrote the score with Danny Elfman, composer of the

The Fortune Teller
Here Arts Center

music for many of Mr. Burton's films. The gleeful recorded narration is by the Irish musician and actor Gavin Friday.

Detail is the piece's strength, and its weakness. Even in this small underground theater, the beautifully made puppets and sets are a little hard to read; their features are difficult to make out. Theater demands a larger scale, or rather, these diminutive creations imperiously demand a smaller one.

Detail is also responsible for the piece's strong start. The mustachioed Hunter (representing Wrath)

had a quirky, unpleasant childhood that makes his vignette particularly macabre and engaging.

Unfortunately there is a certain predictability to the setup. Few of the other six vignettes have quite the same level of specificity, so the piece slightly lags, as if running out of content before the end. The one-two punch of the final visual climaxes feels rushed, and is further sabotaged because Mr. Sanko's voice is virtually inaudible over the amplified music.

But all of this is fixable. Hone each vignette to the pointed level of the first, fix the timing and mixing of the end, and "The Fortune Teller" could be a great show. As it is, it's worth seeing and hearing, but more as visual art than as performance.

THEATER REVIEW

ANNE MIDGETTE

Today and Thursdays through Mondays at 7 p.m. through Nov. 5 at Here Arts Center, 145 Avenue of the Americas, at Dominick Street, South Village, (212) 352-3101.