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Humor, good writing dot Internet parody

By Pat Craig
CONTRA COSTA TIMES

It's been less than a decade since the dot-com bust, but looking back, it all seems like such an archaic brand of idiocy.

The boom of the late '90s, you will recall, was the high-tech siren that launched a thousand start-ups, flush with obscene amounts of cash from venture capitalists in the thrall of people who could bandy about words like, interface, multitask and user-friendly.

It was a bizarre time, and perhaps the only time before or since that people with money actually thought the streets of San Jose were paved with cyber-gold. Nerds who knew code were the new superstars, and anyone who had a notion of making money off the Internet was anointed with cash.

That, anyway, is how it is remembered in "Goin' Dot Com," a new musical by Phil Schaaf, Chris Thomas and James Walz, currently running at San Francisco's Eureka Theatre. And, as their wacky memory musical unfolds, you begin to remember the whole thing that way, too.

How could we have been such idiots?

The play provides no answers to that question as it hilariously recalls the rise and fall of www.rentalpuppy.com, a firm offering to rent cute puppies to guys having trouble meeting young women.

Puppy renting isn't such a bad idea, when you're sitting around Starbucks. But this was 1990-something, and the idea was embraced as the next big Internet moneymaker.

And, although the musical takes the idea to the inner edges of fantasy, you suspect the tale is not that far-fetched from what was reality back then.

Using a delightful combination of song parodies and original tunes, "Goin' Dot Com" traces the fortune of three innocents abroad in a Silicon Valley coffee shop, pondering their future. Jason (Brett Milan Gajda), Stacey (Anna Kristina), Chuck (Steve Whyte) and Al (Eli Newsom) are kicking around ideas when one of them comes up with the puppy premise.

Faster than you can say "press any key," they are renting offices, auditioning for venture capitalists, hiring advisers and shady stock dealers, and getting completely caught up in the easy money Internet rocket ride that burned up more money than a '56 Caddy burns gasoline.

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It's fun stuff, performed by a talented cast that gives the piece a sense of irony, and high-style fun, playing with an attitude that invites the audience to chime in from time to time and gives the entire show a raucous, youthful feel.

In terms of a musical, it falls somewhere between "How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying" and "Urinetown," although, at this point in its development, it isn't nearly as well-crafted as either of those. In fact, as it sits, the play has some major pieces missing -- it needs much more conflict and perhaps a sub-plot or two to elevate it from being simply a long, funny skit with music.

Still, the show is worthy of attention right now. It is written and performed cleverly enough to keep audiences engaged and laughing through the entire two-hour length, a major step toward success. Director David Kazanjian and his cast and writers have made the show a whole lot of fun, creating a strong desire to see the piece reworked into a more complete and satisfying piece of theater.

Pat Craig is the Times theater critic. Reach him at 925-945-4736 or pcraig@cctimes.com.

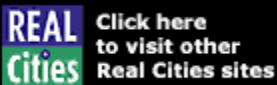
THEATER REVIEW

- WHAT: "Goin' Dot Com," by Phil Schaaf, Chris Thomas and James Walz
- WHEN: Wednesdays-Saturdays, through July 23
- WHERE: Eureka Theatre, 215 Jackson St., S.F.
- RUNNING TIME: 2 hours
- HOW MUCH: \$30
- CONTACT: 415-788-7469, www.goindotcom.com

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