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SAN FRANCISCO

by Richard Connema

Geoff Hoyle “Clowning” is Sheer Genius in *A Feast Of Fools*

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Mr. Geoff Hoyle, one of San Francisco's best stage actors, is holding forth at the Marine Memorial in his 90 minute solo “clowning” performance called *A Feast of Fools*. Hoyle's performance has been seen in many cities in the United States, Canada, the U.K. and Taiwan. He also created the role of Zazu in the original Broadway cast of *The Lion King*, receiving a Drama Desk nomination for Best Featured Actor in a Musical. The San Francisco Chronicle calls him “one of the great and unique performers of our time - of any old time.”



This uncommon artist raises tomfoolery to the top of the its heights, and he is one of the most brilliant mimes in the country. Gerald Nachman once called him “a 12-ring circus,” and I agree with the ex-critic of the San Francisco Chronicle. The Master of Mime is as near as Charles Chaplin or Marcel Marceau to obtaining the ultimate parody of comedy and drama.

During the 90 minutes on stage, Hoyle has some amazing routines both in comedy and drama. It is a completely silent show, except for sound effects and the beautiful transcendent music by his partner, the wonderful Gina Leishmann. She plays the piano beautifully in several scenes and does a mean turn on the accordion, glass armonium and base saxophone. She is also a great mimic in her own right.

There are eight extending scenes in *A Feast of Fools*, from the stridently timed acting of the amusing "Two Waiters" to the old time vaudevillian act of a schlock magician called "Hoylo" who just can't get anything right. He cannot even do the famous "cut the tie of an audience member" trick right. Geoff also does a heartrending piece that reminds me of early Chaplin movies, called "Mr. Brown's Rendezvous." There is a very arty piece called "Four Ages of Man" that reminds me of a Marcel Marceau piece from long ago. It is beautiful done with Ms. Leishmann on the glass armonium.

I saw many funny moments in this 90 minute intermissionless production. The time just seems to fly by as the direction is fast and right on the mark. I love the piano and violin numbers: when things just didn't go right for Hoyle's violin solo, such as the violin falling apart, and Hoyle losing his bow and dealing with the music stand. When he finally gets it together later in the program, both Ms. Leishmann and Geoff play everything from classical to Gershwin jazz, ending up with "Turkey in the Straw," including animal sound effects.

The clumsy magician is especially side splitting for me since I remember this type of maladroit magician during the vaudeville days. They always broke me up, and Hoyle does it again. The scene called "Unfortunate Situation," with the mimic wearing a large brown trench coat that harbors mystifying wicked hands, is beautifully done. There is also a strange but sublime scene involving a fool's stick that becomes a skull and then a full size skeleton

that “chats” and dances with Hoyle.

Gina Leishmann, who also composed some of the music, is wonderful to watch as she drinks martinis from a big glass. She has her own portable bar in a violin case, with its own light and shaker, next to the piano. Her stylings are hilarious but winsome, though she really never gets to complete the beautiful “Moonlight Sonata.”

Geoff Hoyle’s gift is that he can paint an extensive, comical picture of a character without ever crossing the line into cartoon. This is an enormously fun evening and crackerjack entertainment.

A Feast of Fools plays at the Marines Memorial Theatre, 609 Sutter Street, San Francisco through February 16th. For tickets call 877-771-6900 or visit www.marinesmemorialtheatre.com

Photo: David Allen

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- [Richard Connema](#)

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