

Frosted Hair and Wagner at Their Best: “The Ring Cycle” at the Bushwick Starr

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However you feel about fries dipped in milkshakes or *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies*, one thing is clear: mixing two unlikely elements together can be a brilliant move. So it is with Wagner’s “Ring” cycle and the bangin’ detritus of the 1980’s, appearing in tandem in *The Ring Cycle* (Part 1 and 2) at The Bushwick Starr. Ladies and gentlemen, this is not the height of hipster schtick gone awry. Get ready to rumble.

In the production by Performance Lab 115, the story of Wagner’s gods is told in a wrestling ring filled with major hair, blue eyeshadow and bodacious spandex. Alpha-god Wotan (played by Jeff Clarke) sorts out the petty matters of his fate, the magical ring he stole from a dwarf and spends his time away from his wife scoring with groupies. Wotan’s wife, Fricka is way pissed that Wotan traded her sister, Freia to the giants in exchange for the construction of their magical house, Valhalla.

As in wrestling, the plot in act one takes a backseat to the grand flourish of the show—with good reason. The spins, holds and theatrical crushing of fingers and toes are done with such energy and purpose, the Bushwick Starr starts to heat up like a bikram yoga class.

Act two opens to a drastically different scene. If the first act was a celebration of all that is campy and ridiculous about the 1980’s, act two is the doldrums of Reaganomics. The fluffed out hair of the gods is replaced with the sad realism of mortality, and the play takes its rhythm and themes from Greek drama.

A biting wit threads through the script by Dave Dalton, Jeremy Beck and PL115 that is reminiscent of the “bucket brigade” comedy of the Judd Apatow set. It’s evident that the script has been rehearsed, toyed with, and that hilarious moments of improvisation turned into some of the simplest, punchy dialogue in the script. “Sacred fortress? Thats awesome,” ring announcer Cranky Cathy says of Valhalla in the first act.

Whatever Richard Wagner might think of his characters rocking out to “Welcome to the Jungle” or one of the Valkyries being played by a really big guy in a hounds tooth skirt (Matt Borruso), it’s irrelevant. Dipping from two pools of unlikely source material, *The Ring Cycle* (Part 1 and 2) gets it right, and like a deep fried snickers bar, it is unexpectedly delicious.