

ARTS

Chamber Theatre's 'Anarchists' a wild ride through story of police station bombing



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The namesake immigrant of Lin-Manuel Miranda's "Hamilton" was preoccupied with who would get to tell his story.

The 11 Italian immigrants in Milwaukee on trial in 1917 after two people were killed in a chaotic melee in Bay View have no one to tell *their* stories — not even their defense attorney, who never spoke to them individually.

In Martín Zimmerman's "The Not-So-Accidental Conviction of Eleven Milwaukee 'Anarchists'," four actors try to get to the truth of that trial and its connection with the Milwaukee police station bombing of 1917, which killed nine police and one civilian.

Milwaukee Chamber Theatre's world-premiere production is a wild ride, intellectually and artistically, hurling a great deal of information (and more than a few F-bombs) at the audience in a high-energy show. After a few days' delay due to building issues, the production opened Wednesday and will continue through May 19.

Elyse Edelman, King Hang, Dimonte Henning and Kelsey Elyse Rodriguez portray actors who, in turn, are trying to create a play about the Italians. Like more complicated versions of the characters in Pixar's "Inside Out," each has a dominant mode: Rodriguez is a stickler for facts, Henning wants to cut to the chase, Hang's a cheerful peacemaker and Edelman loves the magic of theater. They keep failing to agree on what the events mean and how to stage them, but they keep trying.

Director Brent Hazelton, stage movement director Dani Kuepper and their colleagues use all the clubs in the bag here, including a dramatic boxer-style entrance for Henning as Clarence Darrow and a wonderfully confusing, slow-motion grapple-dance for the four actors that's as good a stage representation of the fog of war as I've seen.

In lesser hands, this show might have come off as agitprop. But in this more nuanced drama, the historical figure who playwright Zimmerman and actor Rodriguez humanize most fully is Rev. Augusto Giuliani, the Methodist minister and patriotic zealot whose unwanted incursions kicked off these events. He's an immigrant, too.

Be sure to keep in mind that actors Edelman, Hang and company are not themselves on stage, but playing actors. And watch what happens to those actors over the course of 90 minutes as they strive to grasp what those immigrant "anarchists" felt.

If you go

Milwaukee Chamber Theatre performs "The Not-So-Accidental Conviction of Eleven Milwaukee 'Anarchists'" through May 19 at the Broadway Theatre Center, 158 N. Broadway. For tickets, visit milwaukeechambertheatre.org or call (414) 291-7800.