

# BACKSTAGE



## Accidental Death of an Anarchist

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By K. Ann Ross

Lies, corruption, and cover-ups can be found 24 hours a day. Just turn on the television. A scandal is being reported on by CNN right now. We expect it, we know it goes on, and we can't change it. Or can we? Nobel laureate Dario Fo used his best-known play, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, to address government corruption, telling a story of police brutality in the death of an anarchist who fell -- or was thrown -- from the fourth-floor window of a Milan police station during an interrogation in 1969. Fo uses farce to address the

serious nature of the injustice. We laugh, albeit cynically, at the horror of the situation.

In Unknown Theater's new production (contemporary script revision by Brenda Varda and dramaturgy by Art Horowitz and Carol Wyenn), Fo's politics are juxtaposed to our contemporary fears of and frustrations with government. Some of the updated references, such as to the current administration, work as pointed barbs. Others are weak stabs: Judge Judy? Overall, the new writing blends well. Diana Wyenn has been mostly successful in her direction. We still see a struggle to maintain the always difficult style of farce, leaving the actors with empty hands at times. Yet the play works on many levels.

Chris Covics (Superintendent) spills onto the stage with complete abandon. His embodiment of the detective is fun to watch, and the play soars while he is on the stage. Taras Los (Maniac) is engaging when he breaks the fourth wall, sometimes in spirited comic riffs, other times in Socratic debate with the audience. The rest of the ensemble -- Adam Edgar (Pissani), Richard Hilton (Bertozzo), Alla Poberesky (Feletti), and Stephen Simon (Constable) -- convey a joyous sense of performing together. The set design (Covics) is a creative use of space and includes the many requisite farcical entrances and exits with a large upstage window that becomes almost another character as it evokes the memory of the anarchist. Although not always perfectly executed, this production is thought-provoking and lingers in the mind after the theatre doors have slammed shut.