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## Shapiro on Theater

REVIEW

# Philly Fringe reviews: 'Company' and 'Thomas Is Titanic'

By [Howard Shapiro](#) · September 21, 2018

 The audience in "Company," produced by EgoPo Classic Theater. In fact, the audience members are not placed so close together in the current version. (Photo supplied by the production)

## Company

“Company” is a compact work by Samuel Beckett, a piece of prose in which a person seems to stand outside himself, or herself, to consider nature, life and death. Philadelphia’s EgoPo Classic Theater, under the direction of its artistic leader Lane Savadove, turned it into a piece that’s a sensory experience with elements of theater — and with a blindfolded audience sprawled out on the floor to experience it. It was a hit when it debuted in the Philly Fringe in 2009, and EgoPo has traveled with it. Now “Company” is back, in a Fringe revival with a dreamy score by Jay Ansill, who plays it live.

Here’s how it works: The audience (no more than 34 tickets are sold per performance) meets and is given a simple list of instructions: First, remove your shoes, then empty your pockets (EgoPo staff keeps watch on the goods) and put on a blindfold. At that point, an “angel” leads you into a room where you’re guided gently to lie on a mat and thin pillow, and the show begins. Your angel — they’re performing arts students from Rowan, where Savadove is a teacher and administrator — guides you through the hour-long show, using hands to cue different positions that at one point include crawling in place. The angels recite the prose, sometimes in whispers at your ears, and four actors playing Memory, Intellect, Spirit and Body have solo lines.

It’s a relaxing experience, and Beckett sounds great in this interpretation of his musings, said to be autobiographical. You will be touched lightly, and there’ll be the sounds of whooshing and breathing and moving here and there. The prose is often mysterious and by the end, highly spiritual. It’s the sort of well put-together, complex, outre piece that best defines Fringe festivals and others, too — after the run is over, the show moves to the Tennessee Williams Theater Festival in Provincetown.

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*“Company,” produced by EgoPo Classic Theater, runs through Sept. 23 at the Latvian Society, Seventh and Spring Garden Streets.*

## **Thomas Is Titanic**

The Thomas of the title is Thomas Choinacky and the Titanic of the title is the ship. His show is one of four solo shows that are supposed to contemplate masculinity in America, all part of the Fringe Festival and produced by Philadelphia’s Simpatico Theatre. I don’t know how contemplative the tall and lanky Choinacky is about masculinity, but he — or his character, who is supposed to be him — has sure thought a lot about Kate Winslet, and especially about her performance as the lovely, freewheeling Rose in the film “Titanic.”

He's been obsessed, and his obsession is the premise of his show. Ever since he laid eyes on the starlet, Choinacky has stalked her in his own dreamlike way — first as a boy with a fan site, now with manifestations that include this show. He's a theater artist who's been developing this hour-long piece for years, and it comes with many parts: He tells the film's entire story in a minute (actually, 53 seconds when I saw the show Thursday night), he calls on Kate to give him wisdom, he mirrors her motions and emotions as scenes from the movie flash onto a screen. In one of these, Winslet makes love with Leonardo DiCaprio while Choinacky mimics her every move, an invisible DiCaprio atop him.

It's all for fun, and some of it is funny — sometimes more for its concept than Choinacky's material. He talks about growing up in Indiana and coming out as a gay man in Philly, where he's unpacked his Winslet obsession as well as his worldly goods, and shows on a filmed chart why he's had less and less a chance of marrying Winslet through the years. He's engaging and emits a self-conscious charm as he moves around the stage like a sprite, all the time providing details about Winslet and himself. His expressive face seems to change its appearance with the shifts in Robin Stamey's lighting.

The show is at its low point when Choinacky uses a form of puppetry to take the roles of the Titanic, the ocean and the iceberg — a funny idea that sinks from weak dialogue. And he lovingly finds a way to incorporate his late grandmother into the piece, but the weave is too loose; his notion that the plot of "Titanic" ties together with his relationship to his grandmother is intriguing but when he explains it, it's just a throwaway. His lip-syncing of Celine Dion, though, fits right in. Justin Jain directs.

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"Thomas Is Titanic" is part of "4solo," four solo shows produced by Simpatico Theatre, through Sept. 30 at the *Proscenium Theater at the Drake, on South Hicks Street. Hicks runs to the side of the Drake Apartments, on Spruce Street between 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets.*

*The Philly Fringe Festival runs through Sept. 23, although some shows run longer. For more information: [fringearts.com](http://fringearts.com).*

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