

[BECOME A MEMBER!](#)

[What's this?](#)

Become a member of our community!

[Sign In](#)

[Register](#)

## An inciteful Second City show? Thank the stars

### THEATER REVIEW | E.t.c. has winning ticket with 'Supernova!'

May 10, 2008 BY [DAREL JEVENS](#) Staff Reporter

[Recommend](#)

Last year's hit "Between Barack and a Hard Place" achieved singular success at the Second City box office with its precise examinations of the Democratic presidential candidates and their motivations. Now, deeper into the campaign, a different cast with the same director takes a new approach, confronting us citizens about what we're willing to do outside the voting booth to bring about change.

And boy, does it work. The new e.t.c. revue "Campaign Supernova!" is an invigorating piece of theater — better than "Barack," better than the merely passable "No Country for Old White Men" on the mainstage and the best Second City show on either stage in at least five years. It's funny, yes, but also expertly paced, stirringly staged and acted with force and conviction. It will be sending many adrenalized audiences into the night.

For one thing, it has that rare Second City achievement, an actual premise, carried out from the title to the celestial backdrop to the recurring lectures from a stammering astronomer (Tom Flanigan) about how a star explodes. In the opening, the ever-animated cast supplements him with political gags and observations, building to the declaration, "Yes, we can! But we probably won't."

But they do, taking on big issues in witty ways. Megan Grano examines the economy in a Suze Orman-esque harangue about pinching pennies, spewed auctioneer-fast but mathematically suspect. On the other hand, Flanigan says nothing as he probes our politics via questions on a screen, all the while inexplicably wailing away to Peter Frampton on air guitar.

A look at the housing market is admirably hyperlocal, with Timothy Edward Mason as that billboard broker Chaz Walters helping newcomers pick a Chicago neighborhood. Regarding Logan Square: "Are you an artist who gave up on your dreams?"

The show's three women do a blunt study in contrast, pairing the prattling of spin-class bimbos with the wails of women in repressed cultures who are skinny against their will, and for whom "getting bombed" doesn't mean throwing back shots at the Beaumont. Nor does the trio hold back in a song about candidate sex scandals whose title includes the words "Where Do You Put Your ..."

Not that it's all current events. There are the usual blackouts about technology (well done) and some entertaining character scenes. An anxious 38-year-old mom-to-be (Grano) sits on the roof, gazes at the stars (there's that premise again) and contends with her goofball husband (Andy St. Clair) and his "Would You Rather?" queries. A party scenario has guests desperately trying to steer conversation away from the hostess' MS, with Grano effective as the one stricken by people's insistence she's a bitch.

And there's supreme silliness at the top of the second act, when life in a Jane Austen-era parlor proves agonizing for a guy (Flanigan) with 21st century sensibilities. Forget the letter-writing and games of whist; he yearns for a piece of furniture everyone can just stare at.

Director Matt Hovde has a cast mostly new to e.t.c., with two additions from accomplished female sketch groups: Grano of the Ragdolls and Laura Grey of Triplette. Grey, with her herky-jerky postures and Shelly Duvall peepers, is a potent presence here, especially in a masterful song done R. Kelly style and intricately comparing the pervy crooner to history's great poets. By the second act, she's won enough audience goodwill to get away with a wild indulgence, an actual mime routine in Charlie Chaplin mustache and derby, improvised with an audience member. Precious and retro, it's not to everyone's taste, but she's mighty good at it.

You know the treatment of politics will be wild when Andy St. Clair starts roaming the house quizzing

people on voter eligibility. (Shy people: Beware the aisle seats.) But by the end, when onlookers' seats have been changed, and a congressman's been called, and huge papier-mache puppets of Hillary and Barack have danced, it's definite that something exciting is going on here.

This borders on blasphemy, but "Campaign Supernova!" invites comparisons to the hallowed "Pinata Full of Bees," the uproarious call to arms that saved Second City in 1995. It's that good.

Stellar, even.

**[TV politics: Audience first, issues second](#)**

From The Moderate Voice

**[Something About Barack](#)**

From Bring it On!

The views expressed in these blog posts are those of the author and not of the Chicago

Sun-Times.