

# LA WEEKLY theater

## SLAVES OF STARBUCKS

Recommended

It's a terrible thing to lose your mind — unless, of course, you're doing comedy, and actor David Beckett delivers first-rate lunacy in his superb one-man performance aimed squarely at the excesses of capitalism and foibles of American culture. Chip Chalmers directs Peter Aterman's biting, wacky and satiric journey through a land of non sequiturs with a deliberate, easy flow from one incongruous setting to another. A startled traveler on KLM Airlines discovers how the Dutch-based company offers its travelers pleasure-enhancing drugs, coupled with sexual options, to make its flight enjoyable, while an equally non-plussed flyer on Lufthansa Airlines suffers the plight of a nihilistic, fascist carrier demanding complete obedience from its passengers. Beckett mines humor from merely reacting to bizarre voiceovers. He performs a gallery of characters, who include an Italian tour guide at St. Peter's, driven to exasperation by his crass American tour group; a CIA agent, whose weird double talk leads to a warning not to eat poisoned Jello. Beckett also offers an amazing impression of JFK delivering his inaugural speech that slowly devolves into boosterism for American products. The cumulative result is a wondrous and gleeful interpretation of Aterman's twisted vision. American Renegade Theater, 11136 Magnolia Blvd., N. Hlywd.; Mon., 8 p.m.; thru Sept. 8. (818) 569-3064. Written 8/14/2003 (Jim Crogan)

## BACK STAGE WEST

### Slaves of Starbucks

Reviewed By Polly Warfield

First you laugh. Then you feel the sting. Satirist Peter Aterman's Swiftian wit lands squarely on richly deserving targets of current societal folly. Aterman's spokesman, actor David Beckett, delivers the savage barbs in such a disarming manner it takes awhile for the sting to register. Can this pleasant, benign gentleman really be jabbing us with such unpleasant truths? He can. Beckett's soliloquies leave few feathers unruffled, few turns unstoned. His manner is gently unassuming—no flash, no fuss—but throughout this intermissionless one-man performance we become increasingly aware that Beckett is an accomplished actor, quietly adept at characterization, interpretation, and reaction. He's all wordless reaction, incredulity morphing into terror, strapped into a KLM Airlines seat in the opener. The pilot on the intercom clearly is under the influence and recommends psychedelic drugs for all passengers. Beckett next impersonates JFK in "a Tourette's-like parody" of the famous "Ask not what your country can do..." speech. Then, with a red silk scarf around his neck and an Italian accent, he's a Roman tour guide herding Americans through St. Peter's as they demand to see the pope and the Eiffel Tower, ask for pizza, make stupid comments about the frescoes and the Pieta, and claim a bigger Pieta in Arizona, five in Texas. Beckett skewers a German visitor working out in the exercise room of a Canadian hotel. He's deadly as a tight-lipped CIA agent delivering orientation tips to newcomers, warning of cafeteria dangers (poisoned Jell-O) in agency headquarters. He hears more than he'd like interviewing a female figure-skating star about her traumas. He divulges dire secrets of a Wall Street firm's success—there's an Aztec priest on the payroll, and if that requires sacrifice, well.... He narrates a slide show demonstrating coded Nazi propaganda in Archie comic books. Most devastating is the piece delivered lying supine on the floor of the Minneapolis Mall as the castration victim of a gang of Clockwork Orange-like teenagers. No one notices, except that the lady in the Mrs. Fields cookie booth asks him please to move, he's driving business away. Beckett maintains his composure while deftly changing jackets, sweaters, and scarves and delivering lethal arrows. Chip Chalmers directs. Producer Henry Polic II says he met Beckett in 1971 when they acted in tent shows in Springfield, Mo., and Beckett played Capt. Dick Deadeye in HMS Pinafore. Oh yes, about the show's significant title: It's only coincidence that a Starbucks adjoins this theatre. But on the day after the show opened, the L.A. Times reported that 17 San Francisco Starbucks had recently been vandalized and added, "[F]or some [people, Starbucks] grew to symbolize dot-com excess, high rents, the homogenization of America, and the pitfalls of globalization." Whew! A tall order for a cup of coffee.

### " Slaves of Starbucks"

presented by the American Renegade Theatre & Spel Cheker Productions at the American Renegade Theatre, 11136 Magnolia Blvd., N. Hollywood. Mon. 8 p.m. Aug. 4-Sept. 8. \$10-12. (818) 569-3064.