

Grand Guignol Christmas Launches Physical Theatre Festival at Art Works

By Trish Ostroski

As director/producer/emcee Debbie McMahon leads a group of energetic performers through routines of mime, clowning, puppetry, stilts and more in *A Very Grand Guignol Christmas*, a packed house enjoyed the physicality of the performers and absinthe (an elixir that is trendy again), blood, eggnog, and tiny naughty puppets, as the cast weaved its way through two primary productions that included *Cornfields* and *Laboratory of Hallucinations*, spiced with other skits and activities in between with a number of special effects thrown in the mix. These pieces incorporate sharp, emo-

tional swings - hmm... not unlike a typical holiday season.

The production features a suspense-driven French theatrical genre born in 1897 (that later died out), that combined melodrama with baroquely gory effects, to create a wildly popular and cathartically visceral brand of theater, ultimately setting the stage for horror films.

I especially enjoyed the performances of Ramy Eltreby (Herring), and Kevin Dulude's creepy Dr. Gorlitz in a cast of rich physical performers. The production's strong staging allows it to pull off a lot of action in a small space. There were special little touches, such as the extra little tiny pro-

gram distributed when a skit including small puppets was about to begin, that added to the colorful atmosphere with everyone, including the ushers, in character.

This show launched the first LA Physical Theatre Festival, and for a further festival schedule, call (323) 871-1912 or visit www.grandguignolers.com. There will be touches of mimes, Cirque du Soleil, Charlie Chaplin and more.

The show runs Fridays and Saturdays at 8:30 p.m. until Dec. 22. Please call (323) 871-1912 for tickets (\$15-\$25), or visit www.laptaf.eventbrite.com. Art/Works Theatre, 6569 Santa Monica Blvd.



Emcee Debbie McMahon in 'A Very Grand Guignol Christmas.'

Photo courtesy of Debbie McMahon.