

## Risky Business

Written by Mike Schulz

Wednesday, 20 December 2006 02:57

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Theatre can be a great escape, but it can also be so much *more*. In 2006, most of the area's challenging works were presented by the New Ground Theatre, My Verona Productions, and the Prenzie Players, and over the past year and a half, I've had the pleasure of interviewing the impresarios of these organizations: New Ground Artistic Director Chris Jansen, My Verona producers Sean Leary and Tristan Tapscott, and Prenzie founders Cait Bodenbender, John Luxton, Aaron Sullivan, and Denise Yoder.

So, as I'm on a first-name basis with all of them, permit me to direct a few holiday cards their way:

### Seasons Greetings, Chris!



Gotta say, so far as my reviewing duties are concerned, what I love most about New Ground is that your play selections really give me the chance to analyze the *text*, which is often pointless in an area where many audiences have already seen (or at least *heard* of) most of the shows produced. Of course, that occasionally leads to reviews like the one I wrote for

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### [Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol](#)

, which was such a bizarre combination of reader's theatre and *theatre* theatre that the cast looked right to be confused by the goings-on. ( / certainly was.)

Yet while I thought the scripts for [Boy Gets Girl](#) , [String Fever](#) , and [The Winning Streak](#) all had their share of problems, too, they were definitely thoughtful, and frequently funny, and sometimes adventurous ... and they certainly gave their actors plenty to work with.



Man, you employed some strong performers this year! The ensembles for *Boy Gets Girl* and *String Fever* were uniformly wonderful (with props to Lora Adams and Corinne Johnson, respectively, for the plays' superior direction), and I thought that you guided Pat Flaherty and Jason Platt to exceptional portrayals in that terrific two-man show, *The Winning Streak* ; despite looking and sounding nothing alike, they created one of the most convincing father-son match-ups I've seen in ages.

Overall, I thought it was a topnotch year for the organization, and I can't wait for more in 2007 ... just so long as we don't have to endure *Marley 2: Revenge of the Bogle*. (Sorry, but that show was *seriously nutty*.)

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### Happy Holidays, Sean and Tristan!



If I have a Christmas wish for you guys, it's that some wealthy theatre-lover will materialize and offer to spring for a venue that *isn't* ComedySportz. I love the place, too, and I think it's ideal for My Verona productions such as last year's *Closer* and September's

[\*The Nonconformists Double Bill\*](#)

,  
in which Adam Lewis did a wholly believable Bill Hicks in *It's Just a Ride: A Tribute to Bill Hicks*,  
and Jason Conner did an unfortunately *less* believable Eric Bogosian in *Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll*  
.

But in the past, the venue's narrow space made such works as *Your Favorite Band* and the *Dingo Boogaloo* s awkward; having action occur throughout the available space is fine, but asking audiences to crane their necks or do a 180 in their chairs to *experience* it is a bit much. All in all, it seems that your biggest handicap *is* the venue, which forces the Friday and Saturday performances to begin after 10 p.m., and which didn't give you the technical leeway to present [\*The Pillowman\*](#) as, perhaps, it *should've* been.

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