

## Brian Sostek and Megan McClellan's Fiery Tribute to Old Hollywood

## SOSSY MECHANICS

Pieces of Eight  
at the Southern Theater  
through November 7  
612.340.1725

## HOT SOSSY

BY LINDA SHAPIRO

She's a big, beautiful broad with legs from here to Bemidji. He's a wiry little guy with a shit-eating grin. No, wait. She's Mad Maggie, Queen of the Pirates, on a lofty quest "to free my family and my sex." He's Ardo Lingo, buccaneer linguist, "a man of many languages," and captain of the galleon *Fancy*. Hang on. He's Norman Goldwyn, a screenwriter pitching his latest script to a couple of movie moguls and their shareholders. She's Betty, the studio secretary who's trying to help him out and meanwhile falling head over heels.

All of these couples issue from the fevered imaginations and fervid performing of Brian Sostek and Megan McClellan, a.k.a. Sossy Mechanics, the brightest young things to hit the boards since Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds. Or Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz. Or maybe a fantasy coupling of feisty Donald O'Connor and elegant Cyd Charisse. Like hip-hop artists mixing and sampling, this dynamic duo embodies the lingua franca of American movie musicals. In their 70-minute minimalist extravaganza *Pieces of Eight*, they finesse plot (complicated but satisfying) and character (they play a baker's dozen of Hollywood types from central casting) through a script loaded with one-liners

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and dance routines that both illuminate and invigorate the stylish jargon of classic musicals.

Written and directed by Sostek and McClellan, the musical-within-a-play begins with Goldwyn pitching his pirate script to the Fitterman brothers, small-time vaudevillians who have made it big as post-WWII movie producers. They've been financing their movies through prime real estate—a bunch of groves that produce the delectable and lucrative Sugarpuss Oranges. The business has hit hard times, so the bros are searching for an adventure flick that will also push those little golden globes—"We make a great movie about great oranges." Which means that Goldwyn is forced, with Betty's plucky intervention, to both act out and revise his script on the spot. How to get those oranges to swash and buckle? Well, for starters Ardo Lingo becomes a citrologist, and the pieces-of-eight treasure for



Eric S. Gentry

**Brian Sostek demonstrates his patented bumbershoot fencing technique against Megan McClellan in 'Pieces of Eight'**

which he and Maggie quest becomes—you guessed it—orange gold.

Throughout, Sostek and McClellan inhabit a bevy of stock characters with protean vitality. Sostek, a superb physical comedian who plays his elastic body like a Stradivarius, switches personas on a dime. Among many other incarnations, he plays both wisecracking Fittermans simultaneously in a soft-shoe routine that smacks of shtick—a sweetly romantic Errol Flynn-ish adventurer with a lisping faux Spanish accent, and a sleazy Lothario reminiscent of Peter Lorre at his most unctuous. McClellan wraps her slippery persona around a bunch of spunky heroines from guileless Betty to the intrepid (but vulnerable) Maggie. They're as nimble of tongue as of limb, gliding through a daunting repertory of corny accents and tongue twisters ("This is my chance to launch my career in pics and nix those hicks in the sticks") with unruffled aplomb. In one scene, they banter their way through convoluted swordplay with a rhythmic rap worthy of Tupac Shakur.

For all the clever repartee, it's the dancing that tells the tale. Whether skimming across stage in a spirited waltz or blistering through a Latin number (he's a seething mass of twitches and itches; she's a hottie vamp), these two capture the versatility, resilience, and visceral chemistry that have informed the great dance partnerships. They deliver some championship-level ballroom dancing while slipping in homages to everything from Gene Kelly's suave rain dance to Chaplain's ebullient little tramp.

Back on the ship, as the plot thickens and roils, our brave buccaneers flounder in the doldrums. "There is no wind—we'll make our own," says Maggie iambically to Aldo. And they do, they do. ■