

August Strindberg's "The Black Glove" Is a Cheerfully Morose Antidote to the Holiday Spirit

by [Dan Callahan](#)

December 8, 2017



Jo Vetter (left) and Diane Perell perform in a rich new production of August Strindberg's Christmas play. Photo by Kamoier Williams.

A Christmas play for children written by August Strindberg sounds like a delightfully morbid proposition, and so it proves in this production of the playwright's *The Black Glove*, which premiered in 1911, a year before his death. A short chamber work, it runs a little over an hour in a new mounting by the August Strindberg Repertory Company (working from a translation by Anne-Charlotte Hanes Harvey). As played by a very game all-female cast, this material stings like the sourest of sour candy, functioning as an existential "bah humbug!" from the misanthropic Strindberg. It takes place, in the days before Christmas, in an apartment building in Stockholm, where a high-spirited eighty-year-old professor (Jo Vetter) finds a tight and rather sexy ladies' glove in the entryway.

It turns out that the glove belongs to a spoiled and beautiful rich woman (Amber Jean Crawford) who is known to be unkind to her servants, Ellen (Crystal Edn) and Kristin (Amy Fulgham). A valuable ring has also gone

missing, and the rich woman blames Ellen, who is fearful of being arrested. Tomte (Pilar Garcia), a sprightly elf, is instructed by a Christmas Angel (Mary Tierney) to steal the rich woman's child from her in order to teach her a lesson. The angel thinks that the rich woman isn't bad at heart, but arrogant in her happiness. "A little cloud gives shade and comfort, and also rain, and rain makes green again," she counsels. The angel insists that if the rich woman has her child taken away from her and given back as a Christmas present, she will improve as a person and find real happiness (and, hopefully, start treating her servants better).

Director Robert Greer is a Strindberg aficionado, and his company has performed many works by this author, both well- and little-known. He has staged some of the first scenes in this *Black Glove* so that the actors are a little too far away from the audience; the performers, too, have to fight against the insistent hum of the sound system. But everyone here plays with such gusto, and the writing is so rich and strange, that these are only minor impediments.

In one scene, the angel becomes bemused when Tomte tells her that the professor is pondering the riddle of existence. "What's there to ponder?" the angel asks. For sixty years, the professor has sought to bring order to what he knows of human knowledge, but Tomte deliberately mixes up his files and ruins his life's work, which is seen as mere clerical vanity. Tomte asks the professor if he would like to be young again. "Be young?" the professor asks. "No thanks! To have more energy to suffer — have energy to weave false dreams again? Oh no!" In this, as in so many other Strindberg plays, there is the spirit of pure negation, and yet this feeling often bubbles up in his writing as a somewhat merry thing, as a relief or release. As such, this tough-minded yet vivifying point of view is something that children should learn early, and a performance of *The Black Glove* might be just the thing for them.

[The Black Glove](#)

Gene Frankel Theatre

24 Bond Street

212-868-4444

genefrankeltheatre.com

Through December 16