

Selections from the Reviews of *Grinder's Stand*

“A powerful revival of *Grinder's Stand* in Catskill ... Rich in emotion and language, *Grinder's Stand* tells a close-focus personal story set against the sweep of history as it recounts a version of the final weeks in the life of explorer Meriwether Lewis, who died mysteriously in 1809. Eloquent and intellectually engaging in its iambic pentameter, the verse play is a pleasure to listen to, but it also brims with big ideas as well as the human toll they sometimes take. A superb new revival at Bridge Street Theatre, only the fourth production in the 37-year-old play's history, offers the rare opportunity to see a work created in the greater Capital Region that has been unjustly neglected ... In the new production, designed and directed by John Sowle, the play is smart without being brainy. It also is a muscular, sometimes raw depiction of life in the Wild Midwest of St. Louis at the beginning of the 19th century, when the young country was roiled by conflicts internal and international ... This is strong, rewarding theater. It engrosses and sometimes captivates, and afterward you know you've seen something special.”

Steve Barnes
Albany Times Union

“Riveting theater ... Themes of fame, jealousy, betrayal, addiction, and political intrigue in 1809 that, subtly, comment on contemporary America ... [Brett] Owen is properly oily; [Stephen] Jones has a moving moment when Pernia faces a moral dilemma; [Philip X] Levine's sympathetic Russell is a refreshing contrast to the scoundrels; [Jon] Lee makes Neelly the kind of scary rough-and-tumble guy that must have populated the nation's backwoods 200 years ago; and [Steven] Patterson's Smith is a poignant double-dealer in over his head. [Nancy] Rothman is memorable as a woman living in more than one kind of wilderness: proud, savvy, lonely and romantic. And [William] Dobbins is utterly engaging as the passionate Lewis, a man of conviction – and maybe not a few demons – who seems to be looking forward just at the moment when death overtakes him ... *Grinder's Stand* is fascinating theater, an experience that will send you back to the books for further study.”

Paul Lamar
The Schenectady Daily Gazette

“An absolute knock-out ... Ambition, poison, politics, and betrayal all play a part, but ultimately it's a play about dreams that evaporate like morning fog and the loss of nameless things ... Costumes by Kaitlyn Day seem period perfect, and the stage set of rough-hewn wood and branches (even the seats at the tavern are tree stumps) underscores the raw nature of the play as well as the historical times. Director John Sowle handles the seven-member cast with aplomb, making the most of a wide, narrow stage. And the actors – especially William Dobbins as Lewis, Kaliyuga Arts co-founder Steven Patterson as the boatman Robert Smith, and the marvelous Nancy Rothman as Mrs. Grinder (her forthright courtship scene with Dobbins is the evening's highwater mark) – deliver excellent performances brimming over with emotional intensity, as well as intelligence. The play has rarely been seen – Kaliyuga Arts' revival is only the fourth production – but it deserves a wide audience, especially amid the current climate of political back-stabbing and the blockbuster Broadway success of *Hamilton*, another versified look back at the history of a still-being-born America.”

Greg Haymes
Nippertown!

“An engaging look and posit about the demise of an American historical legend ... Stringy, high strung, and gamey Meriwether Lewis (William Dobbins, full of pluck) has followed up his exploration of America to its northwest shore at the Pacific Ocean and weathered the more dangerous politics of 1809 upper Louisiana, and is now beset with intrigue and hallucinations (laudanum is a hell of an early 19th-century drug) as he travels to Washington, D.C. to berate the politician’s politician, President James Madison. Having outmaneuvered some double agents and machinations worthy of *House of Cards* or *Homeland*, Lewis meets musket-toting Mrs. Grinder (an earthy and real Nancy Rothman) in what surely is a trap. With a wild mane of long white hair that catches the light like a halo, Mrs. Grinder woos Meriwether Lewis improbably in the double-and-triple-dealing/outlaw cutthroat outback. Yet Rothman and Dobbins find the heart of *Grinder’s Stand* during these seemingly incongruous scenes that constantly threaten the same murder and mayhem and revenge of the 14 previous scenes ... Director John Sowle again creates a simple but theatrically perfect set. Having seen Sowle work wonders with sets in Hudson and Catskill the past four years, I am convinced that if you gave him \$50 and a cluttered backyard in need of landscaping, Sowle would create a set suitable for *Les Mis* or *Oklahoma!* ... The latest production in an excellent year at Bridge Street Theatre in Catskill.”

James Yeara
Metroland

“History Buffs: this play is a must. Theater nuts: this play is a must ... Lewis, nicely played by William Dobbins, is a man given to internalized thoughts. He is a ruminant. He is a man obsessed with understanding the things around him and criticizing those things and himself constantly. He is a man addicted to the drug Laudanum and he is a man who cannot drink alcohol. He is a mass of contradictions who feels a great responsibility to his government, but not his current President. Dobbins brings great credence to this man of counterpoint personality. As his guard/friend/assassin/murderer/protector Robert Smith, Steven Patterson gives a most intriguing performance. He manages to surprise us again and again. As Major Neelly, and as William Clark, Jon Lee does an excellent job. The work here is really fine. Stephen Jones makes Pernia into a slave without convictions. Jones handles the most subtle of roles in a nice way with manners that tell of Lewis’s care of this man and of his own personal dislike for the men he serves. Phillip X Levine handles the complex Gilbert Russell with aplomb. Brett Owen is terrific playing the smarmy, jealous Bates, turning him into the perfect rat. Mrs. Grinder is given a lovely rendition by Nancy Rothman, with intrinsic style which she has in great amounts. It’s a very worthwhile appearance by this actress. John Sowle, who lit and directed the show so well, has also designed the flexible and natural set. Kaitlyn Day’s costumes are perfect ... I could tell you how it ends, but there’s no proof that the way I saw it is the way you’ll see it. Or understand it. Or come to grips with it. This one really is up to the viewer.”

J. Peter Bergman
Berkshire Bright Focus