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Review: 'Bach at Leipzig' at Odyssey Theatre

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F. Scott Fitzgerald once remarked that using exclamation points was like laughing at your own jokes. “Bach at Leipzig,” Itamar Moses’ antic Enlightenment farce now at the [Odyssey Theatre](#), is the work of an exuberant young writer discovering the power of his craft. Sometimes, though, he’s having more fun than we are.

Leipzig, 1722: The city’s famed music director expires over the Thomaskirche organ keyboard, and his former pupils can barely dry their eyes before fighting to replace him. Candidates for the plum gig include Fasch (Rob Nagle), an innovator who dares to question whether music should celebrate God alone, Schott (Joel Polis), a hard-liner constipated with resentment, and Lenck (Dominic Conti), a down-and-out hustler. Cue the backstabbing and secret alliances, all the sillier when the players wear giant wigs and frock coats (the excellent costumes are by A. Jeffrey Schoenberg).

Moses presents 18th century Europe as a hotbed of sects, political slander and hair-trigger armed conflict. “Why must everything

have a name?” asks Fasch, bewildered by talk of religious schisms. Schott: “So we know which houses to burn.”

Director Darin Anthony adeptly choreographs the action but doesn’t find much variety or surprise in the story itself, despite his talented ensemble. “Bach” announced a ferocious new talent in the field: When his heart catches up to his vocabulary, this playwright could be something to see.

— Charlotte Stoudt

“**Bach at Leipzig**,” Odyssey Theatre Ensemble, 2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles. 8 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays, 7 p.m. on July 19 and Aug. 9. \$25-\$30. (310) 477-2055. Running time: 2 hours, 35 minutes.