1,001 Afternoons in Chicago

By Lawrence Bommer

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Anyone who missed Prop Theatre Group's rambunctious 1997 salute to Chicago newspaper legend Ben Hecht gets a second chance with this rich revival. Based on the daily columns Hecht churned out from 1921 to 1923, this sprawling 150-minute work is rife with the colorful slang of the time, though some things haven't changed: innocent people still face the death penalty, and the press boosts circulation by keeping people scared. Adapter Paul Peditto regales us with tales of immigrant dreamers, transplanted dadaists, musicians, reformers, freeloading flappers, lounge lizards, and singing murderers. There's even a knife thrower upset that his fat wife has become a tempting target. J.R. Sullivan's exuberant staging reunites several from the original cast, notably David Bryson as the deadline-driven, hard-drinking Hecht, a newshound who lived The Front Page before he cowrote it, whether he was pursuing a very circular lead about a "devil baby" born at Hull House or interviewing the great actor Bert Williams (Michael Quaintance, poignant in blackface). Michael Nowak as Sherwood Anderson effectively conveys the writer's snobbish as well as sympathetic side while Jessica Schulte is electric as Camille O'Flage, a Clark Street good-time girl who wants to be much more: Camille's doomed stab at dignity speaks volumes about the treacherous American dream. The second act bogs down in Hecht's personal travails, but otherwise this "living newspaper" remains a page-turning delight.

Storefront Theater, Gallery 37 Center for the Arts, 66 E. Randolph, 312-742-8497. Through December 9: Thursdays-Fridays, 7:30 PM; Saturdays, 4:30 and 7:30 PM; Sundays, 4:30 PM; no show Thursday, November 22. $15.