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Theater review

Got issues? 'Help!' is on the way

By [KATHY JANICH](#)

The "Help!" experience begins as soon as you buy your ticket and a pleasantly demented Life Coach asks which section you'd like to sit in: Sad, Poor, Drunk or Fine. You're issued the appropriate name tag and ushered into the Sanctum with a welcoming, if creepy, arm around your shoulder. Very good!

"Help!" the latest outrageousness from Out of Hand Theater, skewers every slick, self-anointed self-help savior you've ever seen on a TV infomercial — Tony Robbins and L. Ron Hubbard included. But neither is a match for this rocking, rolling, sincerity-in-every-sinew-and-synapse foursome of Life Coaches — Ariel de Man, Adam Fristoe, Justin Welborn and Maia Knispel — who, with Atlanta playwright Steve Yockey, conceived and created this swift, smart script.

It — and they — are hilarious.

Stepford-ish half-smiles dominate the faces of Knispel and de Man. Welborn, with eyes that bug slightly and legs that are surely made of springs, not tendon and bone, is downright scary. Fristoe, who seems to steer this save-a-soul mission, is freakishly controlled except when strangling his guitar and belting, "I Rock and I'll Stand on Your Face."

The actors combine elements of cheerleader, acrobat, taskmaster, troubadour, zealot, automaton and satirist. What fun.

And you're much more than an average audience, aren't you? You've come for help, haven't you? HAVEN'T YOU?! Very good! Then plan on participating in your own self-improvement.

Out of Hand, founded four years ago by artists under age 30, does "event" theater, shows in which everyone attending is as much a part of the action as football fans, partygoers or wedding guests. Its flexible, physical and intelligent actors dodged fists, saw blades and unwanted spouses in an outdoor setting in the slam-bang comedy "Big Love"; unloosed rude, crude buffoonery on unsuspecting crowds in "Live Nude Bouffons!"; and thrashed through an evening of one-act plays sculpted into a multimedia happening with live video, a rock band and more in "30 Below."

So "Help!" is, relatively speaking, low-key. Sort of.

Be forewarned that with so much important work going on, the Sanctum (the small, stuffy Top Shelf space at Dad's Garage, amazingly transformed by set designer Leslie Taylor) gets quite warm. Dress lightly, and for God's sake, don't sit near the drunks. All that alcohol just generates extra body heat.

If you choose to take part in the program — as a graduate, I can recommend it — you'll learn such concepts as "Whoa Clap," "Positive Pressure" and "Release Hug," and your Life Coaches will guide you through Healing, to Elevation, to Love and, finally, to Perfection.

Listen up. Perfection, especially, is something this fearless foursome knows something about.



Life Coaches (from left) Ariel de Man, Justin Welborn, Maia Knispel and (top) Adam Fristoe are on a save-a-soul mission.

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'Help!' Through June 27. 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 7 p.m. Sundays; 10 p.m. this Saturday and June 26; 8 p.m. Monday. \$12-\$18. Out of Hand Theater at Dad's Garage Top Shelf, 280 Elizabeth St. N.E., Atlanta. 404-522-6194, www.outofhandtheater.com.

The verdict: As Life Coaches Adam, Ariel, Justin and Maia might say in their chirpiest voices, 'Very good!'