



Whether as nun-characters or character-characters, the folks who inhabit this stage world seem to know they're in a play. Lottie the Librarian (Marcella Murray) introduces herself to us by holding a flashlight under her face and whispering her own stage directions into a mic. She's an American expat, a kindhearted lost soul who moved to Germany one day and ended up living with a gutsy old granny named Eunice Geld (Rawya El Chab). Lottie's story — she's worried that “the municipals” will find out that she and Eunice are in fact squatting in their garden allotment, and she's fascinated by the rumors of witches in the woods — weaves together with that of Susi (Hanna Westi), a teenager with plans to run off to America to reunite with her dad (she longs to be “Brandy Smith,” *not* Susi Schmidt) and with the shenanigans of Eunice's crew of local grandmas, the glamorous, martini-slinging Erna (Lianne Elsouki) and the deadpan, fanny-pack-rocking Ida (Caroline Burkhart).



*SchmidtSmithSchmidt* isn't overlong on plot — eventually, as in all green-world plays, everyone ends up in the mystical, matriarchal woods together as the generations try to sort things out. What it does possess is abundant warmth and an appealingly mischievous energy. The ensemble is credited with helping Bell complete the play text, and you can tell how much they genuinely enjoy each other's company. That's the upside of a joyful devising process. The downside of that same process can be that a show retains a semi-improvised sagginess that comes across less as intentional texture and more as a dribbling-away of dramatic energy. In *SchmidtSmithSchmidt*, many scenes still feel a bit like drafts: exercises that the company did together to generate ideas, and that were probably a hoot, but that have been brought to the stage in pretty raw form — their repetitions a few too many, their through-lines a little underhoned, and their humor at times more rewarding to the performers than to the audience.



It's a delicate maneuver to pull off: maintaining a cheerfully eccentric, liberated energy while also keeping hold of the reins. The uneven stand-up nature of *SchmidtSmithSchmidt*'s script sticks out in part because it's sitting on top of a box of enchanting theatrical vocabulary that the show could stand to pull from even more freely. Bell's forest is a series of glitter curtains, and her potty-mouthed nuns introduce us to the play's setting by illuminating cutout figures of mountains, forest, apartment block, and moon inside a rough-hewn little light box. Now and then, moments of choral singing and unison movement evoke the choreographer Yvonne Rainer's blending of the dancier and the mundane. I longed for the show to venture further down these forest paths of movement, music, and scrappy-beautiful spectacle. In them, Bell has such highly charged engines: They could power her play more fully if she asked them to.



**From top:** *SchmidtSmithSchmidt*. Photo: Walter Włodarczyk;  
*Buena Vista Social Club*. Photo: Ahron R. Foster.

Given that *Is It Thursday Yet?* is explicitly a dance piece — and Jenn Freeman herself doesn't speak until the show's very end — it's