

AMERICAN THEATRE

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■ DALLAS

A KAFKAESQUE LOVE STORY



KATHERINE OWENS

Blake Hackler, surrounded by: Martha Harms, Anthony Ramirez, Dennis Raveneau and Dylan Key.

WHEN A PROFESSOR AT A COMMUNITY college with delusions of grandeur begins delivering lectures a tad too arcane for the tastes of his supervisors, he gets fired. So starts Len Jenkin's latest play *Time in Kafka*, which bows at Dallas's **Undermain Theatre** Feb. 15–March 17. Jenkin describes the play as a “part fairy tale, part time-travel love story.”

Broke and with a baby on the way, Professor Spellman dreams he's visited by Franz Kafka. Kafka tells Spellman about a novel he wrote in 1913 while visiting a spa in northern Italy. “Kafka actually did go to this spa,” Jenkin says. “So did Thomas Mann and Rudolf Steiner. Kafka was a bit of a hypochondriac,” he adds. Kafka tells Spellman that he left the novel at the spa and never returned. The next day, Spellman boards a plane bound for Italy in search of the Hartungen Clinic near Lake Garda. There he

meets a cast of characters that includes a Russian countess, a doctor, an old general, various hustlers and a harlot—and slowly realizes he has traveled back in time. Meanwhile, Spellman's pregnant wife has reported her husband missing and is having Italian authorities dredge Lake Garda. Spellman uses his cell phone one last time to let his wife know how to find him, and she sets out on a time-traveling hunt.

“There are strange tales that get told and a series of philosophical conversations,” says Jenkin, who cites Kafka's diaries and Kafka criticism by Guy Davenport as informative. Black-and-white projections by longtime-collaborator John Arnone will pepper the stage. When asked if the play is Kafkaesque, Jenkin responds, “I suppose it'd have to be!” —*Eliza Bent*