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THEATER BEAT

Swallow this propaganda now!

In "Focus Today" at the Powerhouse, the Burglars of Hamm confirm their status as Los Angeles' goofiest social satirists. A rough-edged but hoot-worthy spoof on motivational seminars, this original play with music is, like previous Burglar efforts, deceptively slight. Yet beneath the surface hilarity lies a savage sendup of corporate America.

The "seminar" in question here is being presented by a motivational group hired for the occasion by a beleaguered software company. We, the members of the audience, play the company's employees, coerced into attending this "inspirational" event by the big boss.

The tone is deliberately amateurish, the acting stiff, the vocalizing of the strictly squawk-and-belt variety. As a trio of bombastic "facilitators" acts out propagandistic scenes, we detail our reactions to the for-profit sermonizing in a special workbook. (A hint: Be careful with your answers. Your future could hinge on your final score.)

As with all Burglar productions, the play has been developed by the company. Music director David O collaborated on the original music, with Matt Almos, who also appears in the cast, directing. Other facilitators are played by Albert Dayan and Carolyn Almos. (Jon Beauregard and Selina Woolery Smith are regular alternates.) Lisa D. Katz does a neat job creating lighting effects with limited facilities, and Teresa Shea contributes "specialty costumes" that are amusingly cheesy. Uncredited slides and voice-overs are part of the fun.

The chief satisfaction of the evening, however, is watching these oh-so-sincere moderators progress from manic cheerleaders to Nazi-like functionaries bent on a blood-letting.

Downsizing with a vengeance, they get outsized laughs.

--F. Kathleen Foley

"Focus Today," Powerhouse Theatre, 3116 2nd Street, Santa Monica. Fridays-Saturdays, 8 p.m.; Sundays, 7 p.m. Ends June 20. \$15. (323) 769-6334. Running time: 1 hour, 15 minutes.