





The Spin Cycle

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Martin Denton · January 25, 2009

It is always exciting to discover a talented young playwright, and that's exactly what awaits you in *The Spin Cycle*, a program of five plays by Jerrod Bogard. As presented by Wide Eyed Productions and Shortened Attention Span, *The Spin Cycle* is not only an impressive showcase of Bogard's range, but also a sterling example of how to mount an evening of short plays.

Bogard is clearly concerned about the state of the world right now, especially the War in Iraq; three of the five plays deal directly or indirectly with that conflict and how it has affected Americans. At the center of *The Spin Cycle* is a remarkable one-man play called *Just Your Average G.I. Joe*, which Bogard himself performs under the sharp direction of Kristin Skye Hoffmann; it takes place in a bar somewhere in the American South, and introduces us to a young soldier just returned from Iraq, who is explaining to some unseen person or persons that being in the army is just like any other job. This fellow doth protest too much: the more he tries to convince us that he likes his work, the more we begin to suspect otherwise. *Just Your Average G.I. Joe* is fascinating because it's so ambivalent—there have always been people who justify and even glorify war, but can they really look us in the eye as they make their arguments?

Copper Green, which opens the evening, takes place on the Staten Island Ferry. A family from the American Midwest—a Dad (Anthony Reimer), an older sister (Stacy Ayn Price), and a kid brother (John Barbieri)—are riding the boat around the Statue of Liberty, while a man who appears to be of Arab descent (he's wearing a Muslim-style skullcap) alternately watches them and tries to ignore them. The father uses this moment to try to explain what his older son is fighting for in Iraq. Anthony Augello has directed this wry comedy nicely, and his cast is superlative: the actors playing the three family members have a chemistry that feels especially authentic. What I like best about *Copper Green* is the tension between the Dad's attempt to understand what the War in Iraq really means and his own strangeness in

OPENED

January 22, 2009

CLOSED

February 7, 2009

AUTHOR

Jerrod Bogard

PRODUCING COMPANY

Wide Eyed
Productions and
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Span

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New York City, as reflected in the eyes of the Arab American New Yorker who is trying to get to work without having to interact too much with annoying tourists.

The Spin Cycle concludes with *Jerome via Satellite*, which may be the strongest and most potent play of this quintet. It's about an American soldier named Jerome in Iraq who is going to appear on a cable talk show (called "The Spin Cycle") to receive birthday greetings from his family back home in the States. The places where Bogard takes this familiar concept are surprising and jolting, so I don't want to say more about what happens. The play juxtaposes crassness, indifference, courage, and love in a harrowing and resonant manner. Justin Ness directs this complex piece—which includes a video component along with simultaneous live action involving the two groups on tv—with consummate skill and intelligence.

Nestled between this socially-conscious fare are two much lighter works. *Hedge*, directed by Jake Witlen and performed by Melissa Johnson and Lauren Bahlman, is about two young women in Hollywood hiding out from the paparazzi. And *First Base Coach*, the funniest play of *The Spin Cycle*, features Kristin Skye Hoffmann and Ben Newman as an 11-year old girl and nine-year-old boy who are testing out hypotheses about just exactly what it means to get to first base in a relationship. Hoffmann and Newman work together like a classic comedy duo under Neil Fennell's direction, never making fun of the children they're portraying but allowing us to see ourselves—then and now—in their dead-on performances.

The Spin Cycle is tightly knit together with video transitions featuring the same talk show host character who is integral to *Jerome via Satellite*, a smart choice that gives the evening cohesion and unity. The production design (by Bogard, with sets by Sean Boat, lighting by Jason Baumuller, sound by Scott Voloshin, and video direction by Brian A. Bernhard) is simple, clean, and appropriate.

All of the artists involved work together to make *The Spin Cycle* compelling and enjoyable theatre. And Bogard's intelligently observed voice makes him a welcome addition to the panoply of American playwrights, and certainly one to keep an eye on.

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