

February 26, 2011

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## [Nathan Havey](#)

New Media Communications/Political Consultant, Videographer, Feminist

Posted: May 31, 2010 01:05 PM

## [Noah's Arkansas](#) [the Latest Triumph for Wide Eyed Productions](#)

Time ain't gonna heal your wounds. But it is about the only thing we got can measure how deep ya been hurt.

As an undergraduate student of theatre, my professors would wax poetic about the bygone glory days of Broadway - what is was like when Arthur Miller's Plays would open. They would lament the fact that no new 'real theatre' was coming out on Broadway.

Whether you agree with this criticism or not, is certainly seems that in an age when ticket prices are soaring, and the cost of putting on a show are impossibly high, theatre owners who are willing to take a chance on a new play are few and far between. The result has not been an end of the era of great theatre, you simply have to look a little harder, and a little further from Broadway to find it.

I had the pleasure of seeing *Noah's Arkansas*, the latest play from [Wide Eyed Productions](#) at the Wings theatre. I left convinced that the next generation of great American theatre is about to take center stage.



### Wide Eyed Productions' *Noah's Arkansas* by Jerrod Bogard

One of a number of scrappy new theatre companies in New York, Wide Eyed Productions is producing some edgy, fascinating and thoroughly enjoyable new theater. Resident playwright Jerrod Bogard, a talented crew of actors, and a superb technical and artistic crew make Wide Eyed Productions a group to keep an eye on.

Jerrod Bogard has delivered a wonderful script in *Noah's Arkansas* that deftly pulls in its audience and takes them on a journey to a trailer park in small town Arkansas where he leads us to take a good hard look at his characters as people - their grudges, hopes, disappointments, and struggles are at once their own, and portraits of the human experience.

See, you don't set that hook- and I

mean set her good, fish can swallow that sucker right down in  
it's belly. People do that too, know it? Whatever barbed point  
their facin' they just assume swallow whole 'n forget about it.  
That way they pretend they aint been caught.

The characters in *Noah's Arkansas* are deftly brought to life under the superb direction of Neil Fennell. His cast of actors give nuanced, natural performances that wrap the audience in from the first line. The coy, lighting-fast, banter between Lizzy (the charming and very funny Kristin Hoffman) and Wayne (the powerful Justin Ness) sets the pace for the rest of the evening.

The set (Joshua David Bishop), costumes (Antonia Ford Roberts), Lighting (Ryan Metzler), and sound (Trevor Dallier) are first rate, and believably create the world of *Noah's Arkansas*. Add to this an original score (Michael Sorrentino) and you have an Arkansas trailer park on Christopher Street.

*Noah's Arkansas* is an honest look at dysfunction. We all went to high school with characters like slimy, dimwitted, power-hungry Tom (Bennett W. Harrell's excellent performance triumphs over the easy caricature and adds an element of a little boy playing dress up that makes Tom sympathetically human). The awkwardness of growing up different is on full display with Michael Komala's stewardship of the character Micheal from a skiddish, rueful, victim, to a young man at peace with the tempest of life.

Perhaps my favorite scene in *Noah's Arkansas* is the last one. Bogard has written one of the most challenging scenes I have seen on stage. It is the straight theatre version of the musical theatre device of laying multiple melodies - each with their own lyrics on top of each other for the audience to sort out (or buy the CD to decipher). The scene is the dramatic climax of the show and it is so densely packed it creates the chaos of a family fight. Bogard brilliantly uses this scene to deliver some of his best lines (including the two I have included here). The effect is to have the audience combat the urge to disengage from the shouting, instead straining to make sense of it all as Lester (played by the expert Erik Frandsen) softly delivers a speech heavy with the weight of his life's experience.

*Noah's Arkansas* ends with Tammy's assertion (Judy Merrick surprises the audience with her power and depth after appearing to be a mostly non-speaking role) that ". . . everything is in order here." The astute viewer will note that the opening line of the play was "There is no order here."

Bogard believes in simplicity in his story lines and in essence, *Noah's Arkansas* has all the significance and complexity of the transition from no order to order. Yet, his characters bring great significance, and complex emotion to what is, on the surface, simple. In that, Bogard, the cast and crew, and everyone involved with Wide Eyed Productions have achieved what theater is meant to achieve. *Noah's Arkansas* provides us with a mirror for examining the great significance and emotion we bring to the simple story we call being human.

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