

# High Plains

## New York International Fringe Festival

reviewed by **Nat Cassidy**

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One of the most exciting things about the New York International Fringe Festival is the wealth of wacky, novel, uniquely spectacular shows that are able to see production under its auspices. Where else but FringeNYC would we get the chance to see singing LOLCats, spermatozoa puppets, and not one, but two adaptations of Dante's *Inferno* (just to scratch less than 2% of the surface)? However, amidst this highly entertaining and quirky motley, it is an absolute delight to see a show that strips away everything but the barest of essentials and reminds you that all you really need for an effective night of theatre is an interesting character with a story to tell. Such a show is *High Plains*.

A review of *High Plains* (written and performed by Brian Watkins and directed by Anthony Reimer) poses a conundrum for its writer. I went in knowing next to nothing about the plot—something I think the producers intended—and, though a summation of what happens could be done in just a few short sentences, a large amount of the delight in watching the piece comes from following the character's telling of it. Watkins and Reimer do a fantastic job in dispensing information in an effectively organic way, and to give any of that away in advance would be a shame.

Here's what I can tell you. When we meet Jake—a nervous, scrappy guy sitting in a chair next to a pair of crutches and a bottle of pain medication—he warns us that he has already been drinking. He's not from here, and he won't be staying long. He's not in good condition physically or mentally. And there's a hole in his shirt. I can also tell you that things won't play out the way you think they will.

Suffice it to say, then, that *High Plains* is a thoroughly engaging, expertly acted, and terrifically written piece. A one-man-show, it plays like a modern-day campfire ghost story, only the flames are replaced by the neon lights of a local bar, and the ghosts are not chain-rattling specters, but the mysterious manifestations of a complicated past.

Watkins has written a disturbing, thought-provoking tale with an ending that is guaranteed to inspire debate and reflection, and Reimer's direction ensures that we are nothing other than rapt with attention. There's no set, no props (other than the paltry handful listed above), no blocking, no sound effects, no puppets, no musical numbers. . . and absolutely no reason to miss out on such an effective evening of theatre.