

The Common Air

Review by Tanisia Morris

In the one-man show *The Common Air*, playwrights Alex Lyras and Robert McCaskill confront every traveler's worst nightmare: Being trapped in an airport for hours during a possible terrorist attack. Directed by McCaskill and performed by Lyras, *The Common Air* unveils the thoughts of six charismatic men who are bearing the wait with basic chit chat that eventually leads to the divulgence of their ponderous life stories.

Set in a present-day JFK Airport, the play is divided into vignettes that allow Lyras to change his garbs and guises as passengers are updated on the status of the delays via loudspeaker. The transitions from character to character are executed gracefully by the design team, which includes Casey Smith (set), Ken Rich (sound) and Perchik Kreiman-Miller (lighting).



The first of the characters is an Iraqi cab driver with a love for America and all of its "abundance." Not one to be disheartened by life's nuisances, the cabby confesses that he dances in the streets during traffic jams to the airport while his passengers often sit bewildered in the backseat. Lyras captivates with a Middle-Eastern accent that neither dithers nor diffuses throughout the whole tirade. (The same could be said of Lyras's Southern drawl in his later portrayal of a Texan professor.)

Other personas include a chatty lawyer who has had one too many drinks at a cocktail lounge. An exemplary model of what it means to multi-task, he is drinking, trying to negotiate a deal via text message, talking on his cell-phone, and giving advice to a white DJ/rapper who has stolen another composer's piece of music and claimed it as his own. But the DJ has a perfect excuse that the lawyer finds viable: "Where I come from, that's intent to discontinue use," the DJ says in a comical bad-boy tone. And just when you think things can't get anymore hysterical, we meet a Texan professor who is having a side-splitting spat with his ex-wife over the custody of his young son, Tyler.

The last narrative takes a more solemn turn as it involves an Iraqi-born American who has returned to Iraq to reunite with his mother — only to be held hostage by Shiite militants in Baghdad. But fortunately, he is set free and arrives back in America in a cab with none other than the Iraqi cabby to whom we were introduced in the beginning of the play.

That said, Lyras and McCaskill's ability to link all of the characters together in such an original way adds to the immediate success of *The Common Air*. The characters' life stories are so colorful and alluring that they curb any form of turbulence that might be brewing on the outskirts of the production.