



Los Angeles Performances

The Common Air

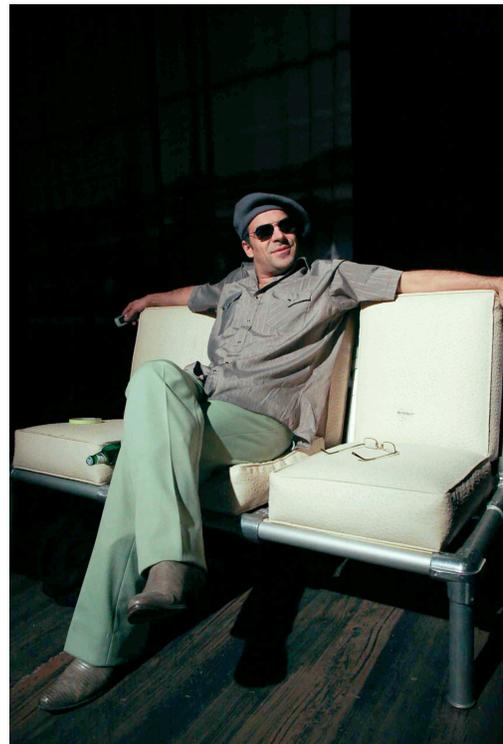
A Limited Engagement One-Man Wonder

By Keisha7

The Common Air is a one-man play depicting a day in the life of six people who are bound for, or trapped in, a New York City airport during a security lockdown, under the threat of terrorist activity. Lyras runs the gambit of characters in this transient environment, and as one might expect, they all share a common mantra.

One-man shows are a tough sell because the performer is asking the audience to see the character beyond the actor's physical stature. However, Alex Lyras makes it all-too-easy for his audience, with precise characterizations and elemental wardrobe changes, allowing him to disappear from one character to the next.

Co-written with long time collaborator Robert McCaskill, *The Common Air* begins with an Iraqi Cabbie who is fascinated with America's blatant "disregard for abundance". He is imperturbable, though, because he has seen "The Secret". He is content driving his taxi, albeit recklessly, talking non-stop to every fare, playing his music loudly, and even leaving his cab and dancing in the street to pass the time when stuck in a traffic jam. He is not only *creating his own reality*, he has come up with an idea for a network reality show: a day in the life of five characters who are unable to "face themselves one hundred percent." These are the people we're about to meet.



The 2nd character, a Gallery Owner, was happy to arrive at the airport and get the hell away from the cabbie. He has his own problems; he abandoned a lover during a gay-bashing, and has retreated into the tidings of his own success. For this character, *creating your own reality*, means conquering the guilt that lies just below the surface, even if it's through denial.

The 3rd character, a corporate litigator, is not impressed with the Gallery Owner's tragic love story. This palm-pilot pounding, vodka swigging attorney creates *his* own reality by choosing a point of view to champion, and then championing it, by "inserting his own rules, within the rules the already exist." Under this methodology, anything is possible, even the airport lounge's cocktail waitress, Vanessa.

4th in line is a DJ on his way to Miami to spin at an all night rave. He warms to the lawyer's idea of inserting your own rules, especially since he's entangled in a lawsuit for plagiarism. He deftly wields a pocket thesaurus, dropping multi-syllabic words like *austraopithicus* in an effort to write the dope-est raps ever. The power of music--which we witness the DJ create in a heightened segment of sound design created by the masterful Ken Rich-- helps him to "transmogrify" his own reality.

Next we meet a College Professor who's been trapped in the airport for twelve hours with his son, Tyler. He seems content to be at the mercy of fate because he has a more passive/aggressive approach to creating own reality. He uses philosophy to twist the parts he doesn't like, (i.e., his wife leaving him for a 20 year old is a sign she wants him back) and condones the parts he does, (feeding Tyler chicken nuggets in the absence of his tyrannical Ex).

Lyras' final transformation of the evening is into an unassuming grad student who finds himself in the cab, driven by the first character. After all the flights have been cancelled, he makes his way across town to crash a friend, and finds himself telling the cabbie about how he is Iraqi born but moved to America with his father when he was a boy. He takes us through a touching journey of fractured identity as a result of losing his mother and his faith.

What's most impressive is the way Lyras not only captures the various mannerisms or accents of each character, but he manages to manifest a very distinct energy for each. There is no residue from one character to the next. His transformations are clean and well defined, without being overdrawn. Truly a one-man show, Lyras moves all his own set pieces without the aid of stagehands.

It is a tireless performance that illuminates a shining slice of humanity. The overall effect is an impressive parade of colorful characters that are as passionate as they are diverse. It's a wonderful work that subtly illuminates the one thing most of us have in common: Hope.