

Legit Review

The Common Air

By Julio Martinez

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In an emotionally involving, finely detailed perf, thesp/co-scripter Alex Lyras intertwines the lives of six disparate men who have had their individual agendas disrupted by an airport bomb scare. Helmer Robert McCaskill, who also co-scripts, keeps the spotlight focused directly on the rapid dissolution of facade as these men willingly leap into the distraction of fleeting, instantaneous companionship.

The play is set in the environs of JFK during an 18-hour period. The social chaos of jammed traffic, delayed and cancelled flights and hordes of stranded souls is the stuff of life for the Immigrant, a tank-top-attired Iraqi cabbie, who relentlessly bombards his (unseen) traffic-trapped passenger with a jaundiced appreciation of his adopted country's monumental "disregard of abundance." Lyras invests this uncomplicated soul with a delicious aura of positive thinking, whether he's extolling his idea for a new reality TV show or dancing outside his cab when traffic is stalled to a standstill.



The subsequent vignettes -- separated by brief blackouts that allow Lyras to completely change his attire and persona -- connect each of the characters as they are forced to deal with the unseen forces that have disrupted their lives. The scenes are facilitated by the supportive, mood-enhancing designs of Dana Bauer (sets), Kimberely Negrete (lights) and Ken Rich (music/sound).

Within the scripters' impressively economical exposition, Lyras quickly exposes the demon within each character's psyche, as each is compelled to admit to his own concept of "inventing reality." A nattily attired, sneeringly erudite art dealer utilizes his

forced idleness within the terminal to debate his plans to devote his life to making amends to a former lover whom he deserted when they were both attacked during a gay-bashing fracas.

In a tour de force exhibit of verbal and physical dexterity, an airport cocktail lounge-dwelling lawyer juggles nonstop text messaging, barrages of his philosophical "justification for situational ethics" and generous helpings of advice to a legally challenged white rapper-DJ, topped off by his good-natured but relentless pursuit of a cocktail waitress.

Lyras is quite comical as the rapper-DJ who is compelled to offer a justification for ripping off a composer, highlighted by a poignant amalgamation of his reveries and Rich's original music. Admitting he did retrieve the composer's tapes after they were thrown into the trash, the rapper proclaims, "Where I come from, that's intent to discontinue use."

The most intriguing member of Lyras' menagerie is a drawling West Texan whose good ole boy persona is in direct contrast to his position as a university philosophy professor. It is palpably ironic that he can fluidly voice his edicts about the status of our civilization all while engaging in nonstop cell-phone duels with his ex-wife over custody of their (unseen) son Tyler, who is lost within the realm of his "Grand Theft Auto" videogame.

In a theatrically rewarding exercise in going full circle, the closing vignette profiles an emotionally damaged American college student, who has just returned from working in Iraq, the land of his birth. Traumatized by the early loss of his mother and his recent terrorizing experiences in his former homeland, he is astounded to see his cabbie react to a stoppage in traffic by exiting his vehicle and dancing in the street.

"The Common Air" certainly has the legs for a potential Off Broadway foray.