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The Media is the Message

by Li Cornfeld

The Spin Cycle: An Evening of One-Acts by Jerrod Bogard reviewed January 23, 2009

With meta-news programs

in the vein of *The Daily Show* and satirical press a la *The Onion* as much a part of the media establishment as they are its subversive critics, conversations about the state of American media are integral to political discourse. The years of the Bush Administration saw a number of political protests in the form of downtown theater productions, many of which tackled the subject of partisan press. Complaints of media bias, from people on all sides of the political spectrum, are as commonplace as media consumption; channeling that frustration into suave, startling theater is considerably more rare. *The Spin Cycle*, a collection of five thematically linked short plays by Jerrod Bogard, falls squarely into the category of plays that do exactly that.



Kristin Hoffman and Ben Newman
Photo Credit: Paul Newland

The five directors of each of the plays deftly locate terrific comedy in each of Bogard's scripts. The program opens with *Copper Green*, a short play directed by Anthony Augello, in which a tourist family eyes the statue of liberty from the Staten Island Ferry while an Arab man looks on. A less sophisticated play would include bigotry and outright conflict; *Copper Green* merely presents quiet tension in the characters' near-interactions. It's an appropriate opening to each of the subsequent plays, which tend more toward critical observation than judgmental condemnation.



Ben Newman and Kristin Hoffman
Photo Credit: Paul Newland

Copper Green is followed by *Hedge*, which features a pair of Hollywood devotees bemoaning the paparazzi even as they obsess over celebrity, irony earnestly embodied by Melissa Johnson and Lauren Bahlman, and *Just Your Average G.I. Joe*, in which a war vet explains the job of being a soldier. The short solo performance piece, which Bogard performs, has the most meandering scope of the plays that comprise *The Spin Cycle*. With direction by Kristin Skye Hoffman, the likable soldier's varied perspectives are appropriately grounded.

First Base Coach the penultimate show of the program, is the least explicitly related to media or politics, although it has a lot to do with innocence: a pair of school children, played by adult actors Hoffman and Ben Newman, figure out the ins and outs of rounding the bases. Adults playing children, especially children learning to practice the art of flirtation, risks coming across as either overly precious or uncomfortably inappropriate; *First Base Coach* does neither. Bogard's script works in pop cultural references that are both wholly organic and wonderfully silly. Costume Consultant Hired Guns makes its best contribution to the evening by not putting Hoffman in pigtails, the most obnoxiously routine way of broadcasting a character's little-girlness. This character is not a pigtailed sort of little girl, and Hoffman and Newman deserve a lot of

THE SPIN CYCLE: AN EVENING OF ONE-ACTS BY JERROD BOGARD

Player Loft

Category: Festival
Written by: Jerrod Bogard
Directed by: Kristin Skye Hoffmann, Neil Fennell, Justin Ness, Anthony Augello and Jake Witten
Produced by: Wide Eyed Productions and Shortened Attention Span Theatre
Opened: January 22, 2009
Closed: February 7, 2009
Running Time: 90 minutes

Theater: Player Loft
Address: 115 MacDougal St. New York, NY 10012
[Yahoo! Maps Directions](#)

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BOX OFFICE

Tickets: \$18.00
 Students and Seniors are \$15 Free for AEA members

CREDITS

Creative Team
Written by: Jerrod Bogard
Directed by: Anthony Augello, Jake Witten, Kristin Skye, Hoffman, Neil Fennel, Justin Nes, Brian Bernhard
Produced by: Shortened Attention Span Theatre, Wide Eyed Productions, Carlo Rivieccio and Christy Benanti
Light Designer: Jason Baunuller
Sound Designer: Scott Voloshin

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credit for lending their characters heaps of specificity rather than playing vague children. The result is a touching, extremely funny scene that is a pleasure to watch.

Throughout the program, each of the short plays are threaded together with clips of segments from *The Spin Cycle*, a TV program styled after Fox news shows, hosted by the Bill O'Reilly-esque Dan Dillinger. Played with bombastic showmanship by Justin Ness, the Dillinger segments, directed by Brian Bernhard, succinctly link the short plays while demonstrating Bogard's point about the tenuous relationship between partisan press and political truths.



Alexandra Cremer Howard Mears Jessica Garavuso and Daniela Genoble
Photo Credit: Paul Newland

Jerome Via Satellite, the final play of the evening, unites the mediated TV segments with live performance. The play depicts an episode of the news program as it unfolds live, with satellite feeds from an American living room and a U.S. military base in Iraq; the TV show purports to unite an overseas soldier with his family on the home front. Early on, it becomes clear that the news program is influencing the story as much as reporting it. As the play progresses, the full extent of the media manipulation becomes clear as the evening of plays climaxes with its strongest indictment of mediated politics. The large cast conveys a startling, powerful eeriness that is undone only when the script spells out exactly what has transpired.

Ness' direction of the final piece renders the situation clear; exposition that occurs after unsettling revelations is not only unneeded but, in attempting to wrap up the story, weakens the effects of the evening's most climactic moments. Until then, the plays do an impressive job of assuming a smart, savvy audience. Anyone interested in the intersections of pop culture and politics, and the media spin of it, will be happy to be part of it.



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Set Designer: Sean Boat
Costume Consultant: Hired Guns
Video Editor: Brian Bernhand

Cast

COPPER GREEN
Anthony Reimer as Dad
Stacy Ayn Price as Danielle
Ivan Goris as Arab Man
John Barbieri as Jake

HEDGE
Melissa Johnson as Seline
Lauren Bahlman as Amber

JUST YOUR AVERAGE
G.I. JOE
Jerrod Bogard as Joe

FIRST BASE COACH
Kristen Skye Hoffman as Amy
Ben Newman as Ben

JEROME VIA SATELLITE
Justin Nes as Dan Dillinger
Joshua David Bishop as Assistant Director
Andrew Harris as Iraq Producer
Jessica Garavuso as Kelly
Liz White as USA Producer
Kevin Perri as Priv.
Michael Jimenez
Lucy McRae as Make-Up Girl
Alexandra Cremer as Mom
Duane Chivon Ferguson as Sgt. Balpine
Howard Mears as Dad
Trevor Dallier as Priv.
Zansky
Daniela Genoble as Marina

Crew

Production Stage Manager: Christy Bananti
Video Technician: Pawl Bazile
Production Assistant: Bridgette Handler

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