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Play Review: A Suicide-Site Guide To The City

Death of life

There's much to learn from O'Donnell's one-man show

By JOHN COULBOURN -- Toronto Sun



TORONTO -- Don't let the title scare you. Darren O'Donnell's *A Suicide-Site Guide To The City* is more about illuminated minds than luminous veils. And frankly, O'Donnell's one-man show, which opened, fresh from stints in Victoria and Edinburgh, on the mainstage of Buddies In Bad Times on Thursday (a Mammalian Diving Reflex production), isn't much concerned with suicide or the sites that might lend themselves to it at all.



Instead, it's a sometimes exhilarating and frankly bizarre ride through time and the mind of a quirky playwright who isn't really all that suicidal at all -- although he does admit to having moments of wishing vaguely that he no longer existed.

What has him in a life-denying lather, it seems, is the state of the world, or more precisely, the state of his world.

That is a world where, not surprisingly, theatre plays a large part and O'Donnell feels that theatre and its creativity somehow have been subverted, diverted or simply ridden off the rails in a world at least temporarily preoccupied with everything from terrorism and power blackouts to reality television.

So he sets out to reinvent his world by turning theatre into a conversation -- a conversation that moves well beyond the borders of the world of theatre to explore everything from sex to the state of policing in a world flirting with police statehood.

And no, before you panic, let's make it perfectly clear: This is not one of those shows where unwilling patrons are dragged on stage and embarrassed beyond endurance for the amusement of their fellows. From the top, it is you who determines the level of your participation as O'Donnell makes it very clear you are free to leave at any time with assurances that your going will not offend.

In fact, what is so amazing about this show is O'Donnell's ongoing determination to keep things civilized. He may be an anarchist (just like he may be suicidal), but if he is, rest assured this is the most polite anarchist you're likely to meet. And meet him you will, for he tries to greet every single patron at the door before he launches into his time-tossed vision of what could be described as anartistry, best defined as a golden vision of an urban world ruled by artists. Under the direction of Rebecca Picherack, with the onstage assistance of Nicholas Murray (sound) and John Patrick Robichaud (lights), O'Donnell moves through many moods from the fierce to the nearly fey, challenging the boundaries of conventional theatre at every turn with mixed success.

Chances are he will leave you confused, bemused, amused and finally strangely enthused -- which isn't bad, considering the title. [http://jam.canoe.ca/Theatre/Reviews/A/A_Suicide-Site_Guide_To_The_City/2005/03/05/951364-sun.html]

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