



A Suicide-Site Guide to the City *Written and Performed by Darren O'Donnell*

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Never a dull moment. From the time you're seated and settle your coat facing the open set, and a guy, who turns out to be O'Donnell, comes in passing the hat for a homeless person outside, to the final routine when O'Donnell leaves the darkened stage to deal with someone pounding on the house door, all the while keeping in touch with the audience via a mike, telling us it's the homeless person who needs some attention, and while he's dealing with that O'Donnell tells us what he will be saying and doing when he gets back, and what we will be thinking, and what the final words of the performance will be, there is never a dull moment.



So if it turns out that it's not all about suicide, and that the piece doesn't roam all over the city, you don't really care because from the moment O'Donnell walks through the house and onto the stage and stands in the centre of the multitude of matte-black pedestals each supporting an object such as an onion, a microphone, a video camera, a slide projector, a sound console, a copy of Anarchy magazine, an acoustic guitar, he gets you and holds you in the grip of his

naturalistic stand-up style of talking right to you about who he is and what's on his mind tonight which turns out to be a brilliant 80 minute monologue in which short pithy bits transform into the next thing as seamlessly as cloud-shapes shifting in a sunny blue sky.

This is a play in the sense that O'Donnell plays with everything the whole time he's in the room. He plays with the audience, telling us 'welcome', and that he loves us, but we should feel free to leave if we find it's not for us. He's not putting on a show, he's just saying what he has to say. He's just being, and wants us to just be. But, the audience is his enemy, and he is tired of having to pretend for us, and he is sick of acting, which makes death so attractive and suicide so erotic. This is followed by a bit of Darren doing slow heavy breathing into a mike, which continues electronically as background while he tells us about something that happened while he was getting high on Sept. 3, 2003,

which becomes a recollection of someone asking him for change on Sept. 12, which becomes a rant about the redistribution of wealth and a fantasy about torturing George W. Bush, and a warning that the onion on the pedestal is a deception he will pull later when he has to cry for us, since he is sick of acting.

Then his sound design man, the 30 something Nicholas Murray comes on the stage, takes his seat at a console and is introduced as being 57 years old. O'Donnell tells us that we are now in his future because he is speaking from his past, specifically, Sept. 3, 2003, when he 'is' in the back seat of an aircraft, writing this bit and watching a girl named Farheen sleeping. He invites the audience to be her while he's watching her, but reminds us that "I'll be you when I get there." Meanwhile, he's aware that a male passenger whom he thinks is an air marshal is watching him suspiciously because of the Anarchy magazine he has. But, as it turns out, when this recurring air marshal finally gets a glimpse of the magazine only during the final moments of the play, he just laughs. His laughter dispels all the fear and paranoia associated with 9/11, thoughts of political impotence, longing for suicide, outrage over the war in Iraq and U.S. foreign policy everywhere, the suspicion that Toronto's central police station is architecturally a fortress designed to coerce people who gather in its square into a manageable herd. There is a bouquet of flowers for the homeless person who turns out to be a fiction, and O'Donnell tells us he is leaving the bag of money on the stage and anyone who wants his change back is welcome to it.

The audience can't stop applauding and cheering. Eventually, O'Donnell makes to leave the house and the crowd joins him, patting and chatting and kissing and hugging. The mood is so up. Strangely, on the way home I find myself thinking about suicide, self-destructive behaviour, particularly the way we drive. I recollect one of Darren's bits in which he imagines sending such hostile thoughts to a couple of policemen standing below his window around College and Lansdowne that it's no surprise when he hears on the radio a while later, that two policemen were killed in their cruiser. Believe this or not, at the moment I am having this recollection, the news comes over my car radio that four Mounties were killed by a single suspect in a raid on a marijuana grow-house. Never a dull moment.

The production's lighting man and stage manager J.P. Robichaud, the world's most heavily tattooed and bearded eleven year-old also does his great thing from the stage. The effect of projecting slides onto the array of pedestals so that they look like tall city buildings is supercool. Thanks to the direction of Rebecca Pickerack, the pacing of the piece is relentless, but natural and friendly. The actor-craft Darren employs is almost transparent, revealing its veneer most clearly in his response to several spontaneous moments of audience participation. No fault here. Bottom line: this is a long way from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, or even *Six Characters in Search of a Play*. This is more like one guy's antics while he houdinis out of the straightjacket of a play. This is play-free theatre. Be there.

[http://www.thelivemusicreport.com/2005/March/T_SuicideCity_mar05.html]