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## Guiding light

Darren O'Donnell's smart, snappy *A Suicide-Site Guide* explores love and loss in troubled times

By JON KAPLAN



A SUICIDE-SITE GUIDE TO THE CITY written and performed by Darren O'Donnell, directed by Rebecca Picherack. Presented by Mammalian Diving Reflex and Buddies in *Bad Times at Buddies* (12 Alexander). Runs to March 20, Tuesday-Thursday and Saturday 8 pm, Friday 8 and 10 pm, matinee Sunday 2:30 pm. \$15-\$29, Sunday pwyc. 416-975-8555. Rating: NNN

NOW RATING:  **N N N**

Part stand-up, part quirky discussion, part picking away at our lazy social conscience, **Darren O'Donnell**'s *A Suicide-Site Guide To The City* manages to be playful and political, philosophical and fun.

Think of it as a multidisciplinary monologue that includes the onstage help of sound designer **Nicholas Murray** and stage manager/lighting designer **JP Robichaud**. Guide takes us through the associated ideas of O'Donnell, a committed politico whose sense of theatre insures that we never feel we're being lectured at or told to choose one particular brand of thinking or feeling over another.

Filled with touches of autobiography and of lies (we never know how much of either), the piece includes thoughts on writing and 9/11, O'Donnell's voracious sexual interests, conversations with a streetcar, worries about a possibly ballistic air marshal, the artist's role in urban economics and several Neil Young songs.

And of course, suicide.

An unusual yoking together of items? Definitely, and not, he admits, to everyone's taste. But O'Donnell, with the help of director **Rebecca Picherack** and his designer pals, hooks us with his tales framed as boxes within boxes. There's lots of show-and-tell, but no narrative. The easy-going performer teases and toys with us, confronting us in a friendly fashion and provoking as much as he entertains.

He brings poetry to a tale of the 2003 blackout, politics to a Czech airline flight and sensuality to a chance encounter on a Vancouver flight. Despite moments of emotional coolness that tie into the work's self-reflective, postmodern style and devices, Guide is smart and sharp, putting us precisely in each of O'Donnell's mini-scenarios.

Wish I hadn't been too chicken-shit to go onstage and kiss him when he invited me to do so. He invited anyone, really, though he did mention my name. Well, another time.

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