



2007 New York International Fringe Festival Reviews

Not from canada

reviewed by Martin Denton

Aug 10, 2007

My 2007 FringeNYC got off to a splendid start with the new play from Sponsored by Nobody, *not from canada*. One of my companions at the theatre said she thought the piece was about the dissolution of civilization as we know it, and I'd say that's as good a summation as any. Playwright/director Kevin Doyle's trademark absurdist style informs this piece throughout, making it a funny, scary, and constantly surprising hour-and-a-half of theatre.

It takes place in a restaurant, where the first person we meet—even before the show proper begins—is an oh-so-efficient waiter, in white apron and the strangest blond handlebar moustache ever imagined, cleaning and re-cleaning the glassware and dishes on his tables. Once the lights go down and the play begins, we find three people sitting at one of the tables. It becomes clear to us that (a) they don't know why they're here and (b) they don't know who they are. Now I really mean both of those statements: these three seemingly normal, typical American people don't seem, at first, to truly comprehend what a restaurant is—and more alarmingly, they don't even seem to know their own names (let alone each others').

It's just the start of Doyle's exploration of the utter uselessness of privileged anomie and the complacency and apathy it breeds. Our trio discover that they have some things in common: they're all white, they all live in a country that's at war, and they all know someone named Randy. But their struggle to find anything

approaching meaning and anything resembling purpose feels almost tragically impossible: the one identified as "Cute Girl" finally obsesses over showing her midriff in public, while "Cute Guy" is similarly stuck on appearances. "Not-So-Cute Girl," the third member of this party, feels validated when a department store sends her an "exclusive" discount offer.

Doyle gets right to the heart of some of what's rotting away at the core of America nowadays. That he does so with such wit and panache makes *not from canada* all the more stimulating. And I've only just scratched at the surface of what goes on in this surprising play—the waiter plus three other silent characters (one of whom is billed in the program as "A Large Panda Bear"—you'll see) provide apt and often hilarious commentary on the main throughline of this thought-provoking work.

Doyle's writing and staging are exemplary; if you've not seen his work before, *not from canada* offers an excellent opportunity to get to know this fine young theatre artist. The seven-member cast is terrific, with the particular scene stealers being Scott Miller as the Waiter and Ishah Janssen-Faith and Paul Newport as Cute Girl and Cute Boy. And kudos to choreographer Mare Hieronimus, lighting designer Peter Hoerbuerger, and whoever found the amazing panda suit for contributing much to the show's atmosphere and mood.