Cultural Daily

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Alex Edelman: Beyond Stand-Up

David Sheward · Friday, July 7th, 2023

Alex Edelman begins his Broadway one-man show *Just for Us* at the Hudson Theater with fairly standard jokes about gorillas and horses, but he soon makes a detour into deeper territory by recreating a bizarre and unexpectedly illuminating real-life experience. After keeping track of anti-Semitic posters on his Twitter feed, the Jewish comedian received a tweeted invitation to a white supremacist meeting in Queens, NY. That encounter forms the basis of Edelman's hilarious and insightful monologue which goes beyond stand-up into social commentary.

Alex Edelman in *Just for Us*.
Credit: Matthew Murphy

After three engagements Off-Broadway and Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle nominations and an Obie Award, Edelman's piece arrives on Broadway ready for a wider audience at just the right moment. The polarization in our country is growing stronger and Edelman's humorous observations on our divided state couldn't be more timely. He incisively and satirically chronicles the potentially explosive meeting with a roomful of right-wing extremists, seeking to understand them and giving them their humanity even while acknowledging he foolhardily thinks he can convert them, "Because I'm such a good boy." But his final assessment provides much food for thought beyond punchlines.

Several of the attendants at the meeting are given full characterization including a cute young lady named Chelsea Alex thinks he might be able to date. In an elaborate fantasy, he plays out the romcom possibilities complete which star would play which role in the movie version. “Because you never know,” Edelman quips.

Alex Edelman in *Just for Us.*
Credit: Matthew Murphy

At many points, Edelman goes off on tangents which are equally riotous as his main theme. These include cheering on his brother in the Olympics in the obscure sport of skeleton racing (which is sledding face front down a treacherous track), the anti-vaccination views of a lifelong friend, and an extended, incredibly side-splitting story of the time when he was a child and his Orthodox family celebrated Christmas for a destitute Gentile friend. “Hanukkah is Diet Coke to the black-tar heroine of Christmas,” he scathingly observed, shutting down those who would say the Jewish holiday is just as much fun as the Christian one.

According to a program note, the piece was developed with Edelman’s director Adam Brace who passed away before the Broadway run started. Tony winner Alex Timbers is credited as Creative Consultant. It’s difficult to determine who was responsible for the staging which features Edelman loping around the stage and acting out scenes with dexterity. It propels the action beyond an immobile stand-up set.

The title refers to an angry statement about division made at the hate-inspired gathering. But the show is not just for Jews, conservatives or liberals, but anyone who wants to laugh and think about the current state of our volatile nation. In other words, it’s for all of us.

Just for Us: **June 26—Aug. 19. Hudson Theater, 141 W. 44th St., NYC. Running time: 90 mins. with no intermission. thehudsonbroadway.com.**

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