

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Coincidence & Coveting: Some Reflections

Sylvie · Wednesday, September 30th, 2015

Something was going on last week. Not just the Pope's remarkable first visit to the U.S. that coincided with Yom Kippur, inducing a double dose of introspection, but something else. Something cosmic. Even the sun and moon got into the act with that rare Sunday night eclipse.

In my weekend wanderings, I walked into the Los Angeles Theatre Works reading of *Judgment at Nuremberg*. LATW is always meticulous about the casting of its radio plays that are later Broadcast on NPR and also available for sale, and this performance, directed by Shannon Cochran, was no exception. Revisiting the Abby Mann text based on actual transcripts was an extremely powerful experience. Crucially, what emerged at the hands of the well chosen actors is how much we needed to hear those words again and, in a world rattled by seemingly endless threats, how little we appear to have learned in the intervening 70 years since the trials. In so many ways, they were reminders of the urgings we had just heard from the Pope. The coincidence was a matter of unplanned timing, of course, yet the echo that was generated enhanced both events in thoroughly surprising ways.

The next day I visited the 24th Street Theatre's opening of *Man Covets Bird*, a two-man performance of a piece proclaimed to be for young audiences, which is precisely the kind of theatre 24th Street does often. But with a difference. Neither 24th Street Executive Director Jay McAdams nor his wife, Artistic Director Debbie Devine (who staged *Man Covets Bird*) believe that children should be held to a different standard than adults when they go to the theatre. The children's theatre that they say they hate is the boring lollypop and fairy tale kind. They believe that, I quote, "if children are introduced to cutting edge theatre in childhood then they will become lifetime theatregoers as adults." They successfully have set out to prove it.



l-r, Leeav S0fer & Andrew Huber in *Man Covets Bird*.

Man Covets Bird follows another piece that 24th Street mounted in the recent past, also aimed at young audiences, called *Walking the Tightrope*. No circuses involved there. *Tightrope* dealt with death — the vanishing of the old from the life of the young. It turned the tables on the shabbier concept of children's theatre by being a brief, touching yet very pointed play about "vanishing" that adults were moved by as much as the younger set. If not more.

Man Covets Bird, commissioned by Australia's Slingsby Theatre from an original concept by Slingsby's Artistic Director Andy Packer, goes even further. In 2012, this completely fresh 70-

minute crossover piece with components of magic realism, theatre and performance art, enhanced by graphic animation, music and song, was given a performance at Sydney's Opera House.

All of the elements combine to tell a gentle tale of growing up, leaving the nest, learning to become yourself, and learning to include, unlock and encourage others, whether they be birds, animals or people who may seem different but are not. It is a wise, enchanting and sweet tale of coming of age that reminds us of the importance of stopping now and then to smell the roses, eat the ice cream and all that other good stuff. Its full effect is impossible to describe in words. The show demands to be experienced.



l-r, Leeav Sofer & Andrew Huber in *Man Covets Bird*.

Interestingly, *Man Covets Bird* is language-based, written by the prolific Irish-born Tasmanian playwright Finnegan Kruckemeyer, whose work deserves to be known and done more in the United States.

This highly eclectic piece is presented by Lab 24, the experimental arm of 24th Street Theatre, and performed by two engaging young men — Leeav Sofer, as the bird, (he also composed the music) and Andrew Huber, as the man. Their many talents include managing the white line animation designed by Matthew G. Hill, playing the music, softly singing some exquisite stretches of songs, exuding kindness and displaying a palpable generosity of spirit that spills right over into the audience.

If you have young people at home, and even if you don't, this is one seductive performance to not overlook. I'm not sure what director Devine needed to do beyond be divine and let these two fellas have at it. But I'm only kidding. Nothing is ever that simple. Whatever alchemy has gone into creating these tender and magical 70 minutes, this is one show that has taken flight and soars...

And somehow it all connects to the Pope's visit, the harvest moon's glow, the eclipse, and the need to think about our planet and the welfare of those precious future generations...



Leeav Sofer and Andrew Huber in *Man Covets Bird*.

WHAT: *Man Covets Bird*

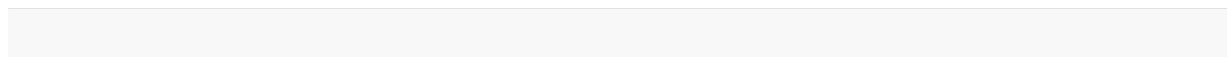
WHERE: 24th Street Theatre, 117 24th Street, Los Angeles, CA 90007.

WHEN: Saturdays, 3 & 7:30pm; Sundays, 3pm. Ends Nov. 22.

HOW: Tickets: Adults: \$24; Under 18: \$10; Seniors, Students & Teachers: \$15. North University Park residents (with ID): \$2.40, available at 213.745.6516 or www.24thstreet.org. On facebook www.facebook.com/24thSt; YouTube: www.youtube.com/24thStreetTheatre; Twitter: @24thSt.

Secure lot parking at 24th St. & Hoover: \$5.

All photos by Cooper Bates. Top image: Andrew Huber, left and Leeav Sofer in Man Covets Bird.



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