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# Love and Work Unfulfilling in MTC's Fulfillment Center

David Sheward · Wednesday, June 28th, 2017

Abe Koogler gives the interconnected-lives format a quirky spin in his play *Fulfillment Center*, now at Manhattan Theatre Club's studio space at City Center. The title is an ironic reference to the giant New Mexico warehouse where two of the characters are employed by an unnamed Amazon-like service. Neither they nor the two other people in the play are finding fulfillment in their work or relationships in an America where jobs and love are temporary and tenuous.

Deirdre O'Connell and Bobby Moreno in *Fulfillment Center*.
Credit: Matthew Murphy

Suzan (the indispensable Deirdre O'Connell) is a sixty-ish former folk singer with physical and financial challenges. She barely manages to keep up at filling orders at the warehouse as she attempts to scrape together enough cash to get her car fixed so she can drive to a friend's home in Maine. Her supervisor, the much younger Alex (a lovably dorky Bobby Moreno), wrestles with high managerial expectations and his conscience over saving the pathetic Suzan's job. Meanwhile, Madeleine (a hilariously sharp-edged Eboni Booth) has left New York City to move in with Alex, cannot stand her new desolate surroundings, and panics when he brings up the possibility of marriage.

To relieve her doubts and anxiety, Madeleine drinks too much and embarks on a hook-up with John (a laconic and spooky Frederick Weller), a handsome but scraggly drifter she meets online and who just happens to live in the same campground with Suzan (that's the interconnected part, get it?). The emotional lives of all four seem as blighted and empty as the nowhere town of the setting. But Koogler and director Daniel Aukin inject this sad quartet with a desert-dry humor.

In a series of brittle, two-character scenes on set designer Andrew Lieberman's bare strip of a playing space, the dialogue and staging pop and fizz like freshly opened summer sodas. A reconciliation between Alex and Madeleine becomes a riotous verbal duel over sandwich choices. The contrast between Suzan's chatty neediness and John's repressed longing  boils over in a frightening yet touching encounter in the front seat of John's truck. Though it runs less than 90 minutes, *Fulfillment Center* is stuffed with such meaty moments and is a filling offering.

June 20—July 9. Manhattan Theatre Club at NY City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St., NYC. Tue 7:30pm, Wed 2:30pm & 7:30pm, Thu-Fri 7:30pm, Sat-Sun 2:30pm & 7:30pm. Running time: 80 minutes with no intermission. $30. (212) 581-1212. www.nycitycenter.org.

This review has previously appeared on ArtsinNY.com and Theaterlife.com.

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