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BY CHRISTINE EVANS

Theater Reviews / Wednesday, June 12, 2013

"You Are Dead. You Are Here" by Christine Evans

Presented by Transit Lounge at **HERE**



Review by Sydney Arndt

Every war has two sides. It can be difficult to position yourself at a vantage point with an all-inclusive perspective, but this new play pulls it off ingeniously. It's a multi-media production that overlaps the fragile recovery of an American war veteran and the life a young Iraqi woman in a war-torn battle zone.

The time and setting is present-day America in a war veterans' recovery center. Dr. Hannah (Kittson O'Neill) plays the work-obsessed therapist and developer of a new therapy tool called "Virtual Iraq." This immersive video gaming system is used for both military training and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder treatment of returning veterans. The audience is invited into the "Virtual Iraq" platform when war veteran Michael (Anthony Gaskins) undergoes weekly therapy sessions. Dr. Hannah adds and subtracts scenarios to the gaming environment as Michael shares his experience. Interestingly, there is a computer monitor center stage that allows us to visualize the simulation along with Michael in real-time. The simulation appears strikingly similar to a war-based video game where the user, Michael, is given sole perspective. The play calls the audience to notice how this first-person perspective can be limiting when presented with the other side's point of view.

If you weren't already intrigued, now is the point where the plot becomes more technologically complex. The therapy sessions are abruptly intercepted by a live-feed Internet blogger, Zaynab (Kathreen Khavari), who resides in Fallujah, Iraq. The young woman recounts the days leading up to Operation Vigilant Resolve, a massive assault on Fallujah that resulted in the death of hundreds of Iraqi civilians in 2004. This is a true event. Her standout monologues pull the audience into her nightmarish reality. Khavari's chilling eyes offer a gateway into an alternate reality that Americans aren't likely to witness otherwise. The pairing of Khavari's harrowing performance and Gaskin's commitment to the role made for a deeply affective and politically interesting night of theater.

The close collaboration between playwright Christine Evans, director Joseph Megel, and media designer Jared Mezzocchi made for a provocative intertwining of virtual and real worlds. **I think they did excellent work in seaming the projections, gaming device, and actors together into a cohesive visual and aural landscape. Perhaps they mean to suggest that healing can only occur when the two sides are confronted with one another.**

"You Are Dead. You Are Here." continues through June 22nd at **HERE Arts Center**, 145 6th Avenue, 212-352-3101, here.org.



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