

Suburbia



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Suburbia Paper A “staple” of a quality liberal arts education would be theater that truly presses the boundaries of conventional society. CU’s recent rendition of Eric Bogosian’s *Suburbia* revealed how great Boulder is at pushing the limits of what is considered politically correct, and challenging taboos. The story takes place in front of a 7-11 in a small, suburban New Jersey town, and follows a tragic two day period in the life of a few early 20 something youths, who are circling the proverbial drain. The youths spend the majority of their time drinking and complaining about the world instead of working to improve themselves.

The main character, Jeff Gallagher, is a troubled alcoholic who is in love with the idea of his girlfriend Sooze Beckwith. To say that their relationship is complicated would be putting it lightly, with Jeff’s “Rebel Without a Cause” mindset and Sooze’s dream of moving to New York and becoming a successful artist. They were doomed from the start, but with the introduction of Neil “Pony” Moynihan, the play’s antagonist, their fate is sealed. Easily considered the most complex character in the play, Tim Mitchum’s character appealed to me the most as the playwright dared to spotlight an American hero, the soldier, in a way considered most taboo.

Propaganda films since the 1920’s have done a fantastic job at glorifying the soldier as an American hero, so Bogosian’s decision to depict the honorably discharged Iraq veteran as an unfulfilled alcoholic with performance anxiety is extremely progressive and daring. The interaction between Tim and the Pakistani store owners was an excellent depiction of modern day racism and prejudice. The action of the play begins with the reunion of the gang’s aforementioned high school companion turned successful musician, Pony.

His presence is unwelcomed by Jeff, who feels his relationship with Sooze is threatened by the successes experienced by Pony.

The conflict only gets worse as Sooze starts to fancy the idea of moving to New York with Pony. The action climaxes with the death of Bee-Bee Douglass from alcohol poisoning and drug overdose. This death was symbolic of the realization experienced, by each of the characters, that life is real and there are consequences to each of your actions or lack-there-of. I would strongly recommend seeing a performance of Suburbia, especially to a member of my own generation, as it has a deeply profound message, disguised with the language often spoken by today's youth. There is more to a successful performance than an edgy plot.

CU's utilization of a Black Box stage really aided in the effect by adding to the realism of the show. It gave the audience a chance to get immersed into the story. In the first act, as the lights go on, the audience is overwhelmed by actors dressed in plain clothes, behaving much as the troubled youth behave in the real world today. This coupled with being on level ground as the audience allows the audience to feel as if they are watching the events happen not being performed. This causes the viewers to be dragged in and become fully invested in the play from being so close and in the action.

Another design element that really stood out to me was the attention to detail in everything ranging from the stocked shelves on the interior of the store, where no action takes place, to the simplicity of the costumes worn throughout the course of the action. In the second act, Pony, the famous rockstar walks on stage with only a guitar case to distinguish himself from the regular people of his hometown. This symbolism added to the theme that

you are in control of your life by showing that even the ones idolized by the masses are still just regular people with small distinguishing features.

Within the first few minutes of the show the audience is overwhelmed with F-bombs and politically incorrect slurs. Suburbia's abrasive dialogue might be concerning to some, and the director's decision to keep all of it certainly speaks on the intended message. The aspect that won me over the most was in the first act when the character most responsible for comedic relief, Buff Macleod, was constantly making a mess by throwing food and beer all over the stage. The utilization of authentic props greatly added to the play's realism.

Buff's character is written to be zany and comical, but the way the actor became Buff was by chewing his pizza with his mouth open and fully investing in each step of his blocking, forcing him to act like a complete buffoon. The second act was won over by a spectacular performance by the actress playing Bee-Bee. The directing and acting styles used to portray the emotional turmoil suffered really allowed the audience to feel how Bee-Bee felt immediately prior to her suicide. Her wavering voice as she spoke her final words on the phone forced the room to tears as the crowd watched the life being drawn from a vibrant youth.

As a typically emotionless male stereotype, I regret to admit that even my eyes came in contact with the occasional twinkle of sadness. Strictly for the emotional experience alone, I would recommend this show be frequented. The production did an amazing job at projecting the message of how life can pass you by, if you don't take full advantage of the privileges given. This life

lesson is strongest during the several conflicts between the alcoholic veteran Tim and the muslim store owner Nazeer.

Tim represents the loss of drive to have a happy life whereas Nazeer being the foreigner with American dream aspirations represents optimism and hope. This message could be easily translated into a contemporary dance number with minimal subtractions from the original piece. The reason this is possible is due to the fact that, like the characters themselves, the plot is rather stagnant without clear direction. The main themes of the play were not ones that were so abstract that dialogue is a necessity, so the removal of that would not detract from the message.

The strong character development would translate very well, giving the dancers room to be expressive with the roles. As with most things in life, this translation would have both its advantages as well as its disadvantages. The strongest benefit would be that the translation would be less aggressive without its foul language, allowing a broader audience to be impacted by the message. The disadvantage would be that in translating the piece you would forfeit the shocking power that much of the dialogue had.

The complete disrespect that Tim shows to Nazeer would be difficult to translate into dance without the impact of taboo language used in the original. In summation, Suburbia was an edgy, progressive play about the dwindling youth of suburban America. I would strongly recommend going to see it not only for entertainment purposes, but also for the opportunity to see a play that is destined to pioneer modern theater. Bogosian's complete disregard for political correctness is a welcomed innovation to the arts that I hope to see in more up and coming theater.