

I love you bro play
analysis theatre
essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The La Boite Theatre Company's production of Adam J. A. Cass's *I Love You, Bro*, directed by David Bethold, is a play which masterfully engages and captivates the audience. It effectively tells an enthralling tale of love, deceit and manipulation. The play's protagonist, Johnny, is a troubled teen who is desperate for love. Devoid of any power in reality, online chatrooms are his only escape. It is here, on the virtual stage, where Johnny meets, seduces and manipulates the unwitting 'Markymark', who through the lies of Johnny, becomes a tool in an incitement of murder. Although on the surface, *I Love You, Bro* may seem a twisted story of devious treachery, it is in fact a simple, yet tragic anecdote of a boy whose desire to be loved supersedes any other. The play successfully engrossed the audience through its skilled use of dramatic elements. The tension which existed in the play was well cultivated by the roles and relationships excellently portrayed by a single actor. Some of the success in this regard can be attributed to the highly creative use of the stage, and the combination of lighting and effects, designed by Renee Mulder, Carolyn Emerson and Guy Webster.

Behind the many masks which he creates, Johnny (played by Leon Cain) himself is just as intriguing a character as any he invents. Coming from a world of domestic violence, lacking any who sincerely love him, it is little wonder that he reaches out in the only way he has available to him; virtually. Early on in the play, Johnny tells the audience he was never an outgoing personality; however, as the story develops, so too does Johnny's confidence. As the main protagonist, the story follows Johnny's struggle to connect with someone, and the gradual transformation of this struggle into an unhealthy obsession. The subject of this obsession is the oblivious teen

footballer, Mark. When Mark first begins conversing online with Johnny, he mistakenly believes him to be a female. Johnny plays along, eager to satisfy his desire to be needed by someone. As time progresses, the relationship between the two grows exponentially, to the point wherein Johnny believes himself to be in love with Mark, who was still unaware that his online lover is in fact a younger male.

Throughout the course of the play, Johnny conceived a multitude of spurious characters, all of whom served to further his connection with Mark. Initially, the chain of characters began with a simple error on Mark's behalf. After mistakenly believing that Johnny's online alias 'Albajay' was a female character, Jessica was born. Jessica was Johnny's first creation, and became his obsession when he came to the realisation that she could act as a conductor for reciprocated love. Jessica, although starting off fairly innocently and without any intention of harm, Johnny soon begins to conceive new characters to fuel his insatiable desire to feel as though he is cared about and attempts to achieve this with his creation of two new fictitious characters. These characters are Simon, Jessica's helpless, albeit fabricated younger brother and Stings, an intimidating bully. Johnny creates these people in order to heighten Mark's feelings towards him by establishing an element of danger in the relationship the two share. By putting Simon in a threatened position, and then using it to pressure Mark into a predicament wherein he has limited courses of action he can take, Johnny takes the game to a much higher level, and as a direct result, vastly increases the tension in the play. Similarly, the creation of Jane Bond and Agent 41579 serve similar purposes as Johnny's previous fabrications. Jane

Bond and Agent 41579 both add to the danger involved in the romance, deepening the urgency of the connection between Mark and Johnny. In addition to this, Agent 41579 is similar to Jessica in that she acts as a magnet for attention and the affection of Mark. The establishment of the new relationship between Mark and Agent 41579 created a renewed level of tension after a lull in the play, and this was only increased as the plot continued and led to the attack on Johnny.

This story is played out on a quite simplistic and minimalistic set designed by Renee Mulder. It consisted of an abstract stage, which was elevated in the upstage region to creatively act as a cyclorama onto which images and videos were projected. As well as this, the stage had a simple wire framed desk structure at its most downstage point. It was to this point that the entire stage was pointed towards and focussed on. This was because the desk and the computer which sat upon it were the pinnacle of Johnny's existence. His computer was the most important part of his life. The set was an accurate reflection of his world, and how it revolved around his online presence. The jagged and sharp edges of the stage also demonstrated the disjointed and shattered life which Johnny was a part of when not on his computer. The stage also worked well in cohesion with the use of a single actor. Being a small and uncluttered stage, the focus was always directed on Johnny and his actions, and this forced the audience to engage with him and added significantly to the play's overall delivery. Another interesting aspect of the set was the wheeled chair which so often Johnny rolled around the stage on. The use of this chair to roll around stage showed Johnny's internal conflict and indecisiveness. On numerous occasions throughout the play,

Johnny could be seen rolling around stage when faced with a difficult decision. This clearly showed his opposing and clashing opinions, a metaphor for his uncertainty as to which direction to take, and ultimately, his uncertainty in himself.

The action of the play was effectively accentuated by lighting and effects. For the majority of the play, the stage was lit with an azure blue tinge. The lighting effects reflected Johnny's personal feelings at any certain time. A perfect example of this was seen when Stings took over Johnny. Stings was the darker side of Johnny, and the lighting of the production captured this aspect of him perfectly. Each time Stings appeared, the lights would immediately and without warning switch off from a light colour, and the stage would be bathed in almost total darkness, with only the slightest hints of light dancing around stage. In combination with this, a distinct whipping sound effect was played to indicate the rapid and brusque change into the alter ego. After the change had occurred, a low and menacing tone was played, personifying the insidious nature of Stings. Similarly, the azure colour which was present as Johnny took the guise of Jessica showed his softer, lighter side. These lighting and sound elements were creatively used to transmit both mood and personality to the audience, as were the simple images and occasional video images projected onto the cyclorama.

Director David Berthold successfully manipulated the dramatic elements of distinct roles and relationships presented in Adam J. A. Cass's I Love You, Bro. Consequently, the audience is able to connect on a very powerful level with this production. The play skillfully creates tension at key points

throughout the plot, and by the timely balancing of this tension, the play was thoroughly engaging.