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Too many problems in Theatre Pops Man From Nebraska.

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Man From Nebraska

Rating: ★★★★★

Tracy Lett's award winning play, *Man From Nebraska*, is a master class in economy and brevity, with scenes and dialogue pared back to the bare minimum. The challenge in producing this wonderfully charming and insightful play is that, when everything has been cut back to the bone, huge demands are placed on the production to make everything count. Though Theatre Pops production of *Man From Nebraska*, currently running at the [Tulsa Performing Arts Center](#), strives to rise to this challenge, ultimately it falls short and is fraught with problems.

The themes of faith, family, midlife crisis and cultural differences are just a few of many which surface in *Man From Nebraska*, the story of Ken, an ordinary man with an ordinary routine, who one day wakes up to realise he has lost his faith in God. On the advice of his Pastor, and with the support of his wife Nancy, Ken takes a trip to London, where he had been stationed as a soldier, in order to spend some time alone. There he meets an eclectic group of characters and begins to ask some serious questions while back home things are not going so well for his family. Eventually Ken must decide whether to go home or to never go back.

Whilst the simplistic set design by an unaccredited set designer worked exceptional well, in keeping with Tracy Lett's minimalist script, other production values were not so well realised. The light and sound designs, while interesting, were poorly executed, with effects frequently coming in too late, too early, being too low or lasting too long. With the U-shaped set design, blocking could have taken better account of audience members to the side, particularly as voice projection was low throughout.

The lack of authority in Tim Neller's direction, and the lack of convincing performances from much of his cast, meant delivery rode the surface of the words and failed to plumb the rich depths beneath. There were exceptions on occasion. Kelli McCloud Schingen as a London barmaid who befriends Ken, and Kurt Harris as Harry Brown, her wild, Bohemian flat mate frequently brought energy and vitality to proceedings. As did Lorie Lyons as Pat Monday, a sexually uninhibited character who pursues Ken. Dale Whisman as Bud Todd, who pursues Ken's wife in his absence,

gave an engaging and charming performance. As, at times, did Randy Whalen as Ken, bringing a terrific sense of understatement and ordinariness to the role of a lost soul searching for meaning. Unfortunately his delivery was pitched at the same level throughout, as was the case with most of the cast. Consequently, the opportunity for nuancing their characters transitions throughout the play was ultimately lost. These problems were further compounded by slack pacing which caused the action to drag, and by scene changes which took too long, causing one audience member to succinctly comment during intermission, "I hope it gets some zip."

Zip is what this production needed, but its inherent problems meant that it never managed to materialise. As a result Theatre Pops *Man From Nebraska* has missed the opportunity to truly realise a vibrant and important work by one of America's, and Oklahoma's best contemporary playwrights.

Man From Nebraska runs at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center, April 1st and 2nd at 8.00 pm, and April 3rd at 2.00 pm.

Admission \$16.00



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