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John Lennon's death commemorated by Theatre Tulsa

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To commemorate the 30th anniversary of John Lennon's death, Theatre Tulsa pay homage by producing *The Day They Shot John Lennon* by James McClure, currently running at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center. Whilst Theatre Tulsa's tribute works hard to be engaging, unfortunately Jim McClure's play is not. With little story and even less drama, *The Day They Shot John Lennon*, features barely drawn characters functioning as opinionated voice boxes delivering social and political commentary. The end result is a relentless deluge of clichéd opinions, but which are redeemed in this production by some sterling performances.

The action takes place outside the Dakota apartment building in New York, where John Lennon was murdered on December 8th, 1980 and where a large crowd have gathered, in shock and disbelief, to pay their respects. Here we find two Vietnam veterans, two former hippies now yuppies, an elderly man and a young comedian and three young high school kids essentially taking turns delivering proclamations on everything from politics to gender from their respective soap boxes.

All this would have been unbearably tedious were it not for the fine direction of Jim Queen who elicits an accomplished performance from the cast. Samantha Woodroof as a former hippy now legal secretary is particularly engaging and Robert Young as her suitor also gives a fine performance. Brian Nelson, playing a Vietnam veteran in his first role with Theatre Tulsa, gives a very convincing debut performance as does Curt Cox who brings the right degree of rage and menace to the role of a Vietnam veteran disillusioned with life. Carly Perry, Barrett Glosson and Harley Turner are utterly believable as three high school kids trying to make sense of life and themselves. However it is Freddie Tate as an aspiring comic, and Tom Berenson as an elderly vaudevillian, whose flawless, quick paced and compelling performances bring a much needed energy to the play.

If at times the pace is a little slow, particularly during the segue sequence that precedes the play, the production values are high. Apart from a scene near the end where the stages suddenly appears congested, the use of stage space is for the most part cleverly done and the manner in

which the cast, when not directly in scene, subtly continue to interact without drawing attention away from the central action, was extremely well handled.

Watching *The Day They Shot John Lennon* could have been like sitting at a bar with a tedious know-it-all who annoyingly spouts their views on every subject under the sun. Thankfully Theatre Tulsa's production brings to proceedings some fine performances and manages to wrest every moment of humor from a demanding piece. All in all an excellent production of what is an extremely disappointing play.

The Day They Shot John Lennon runs October 30th, and November 4th, 5th and 6th, with a matinee on October 31st.



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