

Review: The Motherf**ker with the Hat

Friendship, relationships, loyalty and trust are all tested in this urban drama. Jackie has just returned home after being out looking for a job, which he gets at FedEx, to find something that doesn't belong to him on a table in his girlfriend's apartment.

The Motherf**ker with the Hat is a 2011 play by Stephen Aldy Guirgis. The show is described by Tony winner and original Broadway production director, Anna D. Shapiro as “a high-octane verbal cage match about love and fidelity”. It premiered at Broadway's Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre on April 11, 2011, following previews. The production closed on July 17, 2011. The play received a 2011 Outer Critics Circle Award, 2011 Drama Desk Award, and was nominated for six Tony Awards. If these accolades don't tell you to go see this show then this review will...or will it? You be the judge.

The Motherf**ker with the Hat is about as explicitly profane and acidly funny as the title would lead you to assume. Director **Garney Johnson**, brings this play to life on Generic Theater's stage and offers an unflinching—and very funny—look at the wildly dysfunctional behavior that remains even after the substance abusers step away from the substances. We see three distinct rooms set up on the stage. We are immediately intrigued and begin to think “OK, what's going to happen here?”

We then meet Veronica, played by **Tatiana Mango**. Veronica talks “lovingly” to her mother on the phone in between lines of coke snorting. Veronica would like her mother to go to rehab but overlooks her own drug habit. As Tatiana vibrates onstage, busying around under Johnson's meticulous direction, there seems to be a real desperation for order. Ms. Mango plays Veronica with every nuance of neediness you can imagine. She balances her toughness and helplessness. I just wished at some of her more sincere moments, for example at the beginning when she's suggesting to go for pie with Jackie and when he “breaks in” in the middle of the night, felt a little more authentic. However, she comes full circle in the end and has settled into the character making you really feel for her in the end. Enter her boyfriend Jackie, played superbly by **Rafael Henriquez**. We see the depth of the character that Henriquez creates. He is fresh out of a 24-month stint in prison for getting caught dealing drugs. When we meet Jackie he's ready to celebrate with Veronica. Mr. Henriquez gives Jackie so many layers. We see him go from excited to angry to sad to frustrated all with ease. Nothing seemed forced. The passion Jackie has for every choice he makes is clear.

Life is good for Jackie until he stumbles upon something that doesn't belong to him. Everything that was good in Jackie's life, his job, his girlfriend, his sobriety is now all being questioned. So, Jackie turns to his Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor, Ralph D. played by **Beatty Barnes**, for solace and guidance. Although Ralph appears to be the soul of compassion and grounded intelligence, he's not quite what he seems. Mr. Barnes' portrayal of Ralph was honest. He seemed to really hit a stride once he accompanies Jackie to his cousin's apartment. During the moments he wasn't speaking he was still engaged in the action. You knew this by his facial expressions and his reactions to what others were saying even if it wasn't about him. We then hear Ralph's no nonsense wife before we see her. Some audience members were wondering if we ever would because for the first half of that scene most of her lines were given off stage. When we do meet her are glad to. Ralph's detached wife Victoria is played skillfully by **Missy Hayes Mohr**. She talks the most sense, as the highs and lows of life, drug induced or not begin to weigh heavy on her. Unfortunately, I felt her part was the least developed but what the writer, Guirgis gave her, Ms. Hayes Mohr handles with skill. I only wish during her scene with Jackie her objective was pushed with a little more passion because the stakes were so high for her. However, by the end of the scene she did reach her goal precisely. We, as the audience, were all on the edge of our seats at the end of that scene.

Probably the most delightful character in the play is Cousin Julio played delightfully by **Miguel Girona Jr.**, who, like Victoria, is a truth teller. But flamboyant Julio has flair, charm and, surprisingly,

a wife. He's a thick accented muscle man who likes to cook empanadas. When he channels his inner Van Damme, the result is funny but also impressive. Girona plays Julio with sincerity not as a caricature. Julio provides most of the comedic punch but Mr. Girona also manages to bring in some lovely nuanced shadings of warmth and emotional heart to his character and that character's relationship with Jackie. It's a terrific performance in a show that's blessed with strong performances by talented actors.

The acting & directing kept us engaged, as well as, lighting, sound and costuming. The clever lighting designed by **Derrion Hawkins** and sound designed expertly by **C. Christian Garthright** wasn't showy or uber extravagant and that wasn't the point. It supported the actors and amplified the scenes. This show is about the story and performances from the actors. The costumes designed by **Katelyn Jackson** were perfect for the urban, city vibe the show has and nothing seemed out of place. All the design elements, in tandem with the direction, made the many scene changes work. Even though the night I went the scene changes seemed to drag just a little at times, granted I only noticed two stagehands. That may have been the issue. Director **Garney Johnson** made the smart choice in a set designer choosing himself. Having two other shows designs under his belt this does not surprise me. He's more than qualified. He seemed to have a keen eye of what he wanted to do in this space and what he wanted the space to look like. Job well done. He was helped with set dressings from **Jeannette Rainey** to create three New York apartments, one grungy, one average and Cousin Julio's put together, plant-laden apartment. These distinct spaces lead you to believe who really has it all together.

I say, go see this show if you love a gritty, urban drama & aren't afraid of a little profanity. Don't go see it if, wait, no, just go see it! And like Ralph D. says "There's no point in killing the messenger if you're not gonna absorb the fu**in message," Go See Motherfu**er with Hat at Generic Theater.

