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BWW Review: The Landing Theatre Company's TEN WAYS ON A GUN, One of the Summer's Most Unique Offerings

by

Natalie de la Garza

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The Cast of The Landing Theatre Company's TEN WAYS ON A GUN.
Photo courtesy of The Landing Theatre Company.

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I would say that The Landing Theatre Company's current production, **TEN WAYS ON A GUN**, is (unfortunately) quite timely, but I'm not sure that there has been a moment in recent history where a show about a gun would *not* have been timely. While the message in Dylan Lamb's play is not particularly original, the delivery certainly is, making **TEN WAYS ON A GUN** a sincere and effective farce. Bolstered by the vision of director Jacey Little and a talented cast that seems to revel in the meta-irreverence of Lamb's work, **TEN WAYS ON A GUN** is guaranteed to be one of the most unique offerings this summer -- certainly one not to be missed.

Dylan Lamb's TEN WAYS ON A GUN tells two stories -- one is the ramifications of sad sack, Paradise Timeshares employee Tommy Freely's decision to buy a gun and the other is artist/tiki bar waitress Jessica Person's attempts to dramatize Tommy's story as a "docu-dance" for her company Soul Motion Architects (SMA). Jessica and Tommy's stories run parallel; more than a play-within-a-play, the show is a campy celebration of self-awareness, where narrative threads intertwine and collide, the action amusingly narrated by a non-character character named Stage Directions (Mai Hong Le).

Tommy, played by Ben McLaughlin, is a man on the edge. Increasingly isolated at work, at home and amongst his yuppie friends, and taunted by the idea of not being good enough -- not for his job and not for his girlfriend Becca (Joy Yvonne Jones) -- he purchases a gun online. McLaughlin's Tommy slowly dissolves into a disheveled, Frodo-wearing-the-ring (or, if you prefer, Ron-wearing-a-horcrux) mess under the power he experiences merely holding the gun. In an effort to protect his relationship with Becca, he sells the gun to a co-worker, Philly Brenneman. Jovan Jackson's Philly is an incredibly charming, opportunistic cannibal, who sees the potential gain in time-sharing the gun, and the power it holds, to interested buyers. The siren call of the gun proves to be too much for Tommy, and eventually he is among the cabal of strange bedfellows going ten ways on a gun.

Much of the show's reflexivity is born from Jessica's frantic attempts to tell and learn (in that order) Tommy's story. Amy Garner Buchanan excels in this difficult role. Throughout the show, and especially in the end, she keeps the character believable and doesn't let her stray into overwrought self-indulgence, which would have been fairly easy. She, Greg Cote, and Brendon Duran also play drunk well -- again, not an easy feat. As Benji Kugel, another of



Ben McLaughlin as Tommy Freely.
Photo courtesy of
The Landing Theatre Company.

Tommy's co-workers who tells part of Tommy's story to Jessica during a drunken hookup, Cote is asked to do a lot of crazy, funny things, and he does them well. Rounding out Tommy's office is Brendon Duran, who plays self-proclaimed loser Teddy with an open, red-faced desperation that is equal parts uncomfortable and riveting.

Several cast members -- Natasha Gorel, Jeff Miller, and David Rainey -- pop up in multiple roles throughout the show. Gorel and Miller are each triple threats -- Gorel as an SMA artist, Texas housewife, and "Virginia," and Miller as the sponsor of Jessica's would-be show, a Texas "vermin-killing bullfrog," and one half of a gay couple with a newly adopted cat. Rainey runs the gamut, pulling quintuple duty and showing his range by playing an artist with SMA; Jessica's questionable roommate from Craigslist; a bug-eyed, eBay-access-having Texan, the other half of a gay couple with a newly adopted cat; and Becca's father, "Rich Dick" Phillips, a man who has a painting of himself hanging on his wall and who believes love, at least for Tommy, is a mental illness.

The design team of Kevin Holden (Scenic Design), L.A. Clevenson (Costume Design), Brian

Ealey (Lighting Design), Larin Pascal (Prop Master), and Shelby Blocker (Prop Assistant) have put together an impressive set, and I want to commend Sound Designer John Peoples in particular. The show utilizes a wide array of sound effects and musical cues -- from the crunch of toast to a laugh track and, of course, the music. Oh, the music. The show boasts quite the soundtrack, including Seal's "Kiss From a Rose," Train's "Meet Virginia," The Lumineers' "Gun Song" and "Escape (The Pina Colada Song)" by Rupert Holmes. Holmes' song plays an unexpectedly funny and meaningful role, complete with a Hawaiian-themed performance number (see above). Though the show was briefly hampered by sound problems, which unfortunately seemed to affect Le's Stage Directions most, the show righted itself relatively quickly.

So that was a lot of words just to say, "Go see The Landing Theatre Company's production of TEN WAYS ON A GUN." Why? Because of all I said above and, more importantly, because I say so. And this is a real review ... on the internet.*

TEN WAYS ON A GUN runs through July 9th at The Landing Theatre Company's still new home, The Landing Theatre @ the Docks, 1119 East Freeway (Providence Street), Houston. For more information and tickets, visit www.landingtheatre.org.

***This is a reference to something in the show. If you want to know, you've got to see it to find out.**