

clancy productions, inc.

Americana Absurdum

by Brian Parks

synopsis

VOMIT AND ROSES and **WOLVERINE DREAM**, the two respective halves of **AMERICANA ABSURDUM**, celebrate the comic, vertiginous thrill of America in its many, fun-house mirror guises. In **VOMIT** and **ROSES** a family-run funeral home business fights back a hostile corporate take-over while the two children of the family face the perils of the Senior Prom. **WOLVERINE DREAM** takes us into the high-stakes courtroom arena as poet/airline president Wallace Stevens is slapped with a wrongful death suit when one of his pilots intentionally crashes an airplane, killing just about everyone on board, including a famous golfer. Stevens and his attorney must take on Irish lawyers, leprechauns, and the sole survivor and star witness, a talking wolverine in this bracing, comic work.

awards

- WINNER: NEW YORK FRINGE FESTIVAL OUTSTANDING WRITING
- WINNER: EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE FIRST 2000
- TIME OUT LONDON CRITICS CHOICE

production history

- Originally produced at The New York International Fringe Festival, Aug. 1997
- Produced at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, August 2000 (with Dave Calvitto, Paul Urcioli, Jackie Lucid, Leslie Farrell, Danny O'Brien, Mike Hannon, Jody Lambert, Rik Walter and Nancy Walsh)
- London premiere May 16- July 3, 2004 at the Menier Chocolate Factory
- Produced in Summer 2006 at PS 122

press quotes

"Parks takes a machete to America's white picket fences and the notion of justice for all in a riot of quick-fire scenes, surreal observation and non-sequiturs. John Clancy stages both plays at a breathless pace, as if flipping TV channels, with the cast illuminating each other with hand-held lights like story-tellers under the bedsheets. The energetic interplay of this crack American ensemble is dazzlingly entertaining..." The Times (London)

"...remarkable.." "The playwright's (Brian Parks') political satire is right on target, his humor is both bitter and hilarious, and his poetry is the real thing... Director John Clancy steers his actors with the precision of a surgeon wielding his scalpel. He is also to be commended for his innovative noir staging." Theatermania

"...a shot that has Manhattan's hectic, mega-ambitious creativity encoded in its DNA...bullet-fast gags, bookishly beautiful turns of phrase and scenes that click on and off with a stroke...as bracing as a bucket of espresso..." The Daily Telegraph

"...the fastest theatre I've ever seen...funny, often hilariously so...Parks does wordplay, Pythonesque surrealism and brilliant banter. Thrilling" Time Out London

"...a pair of caustic, hyperarticulate comedies which fan flames of inspiration. Playwright Brian Parks and an expert cast send up American culture in the venomous tradition of Christopher Durang." The New York Times

"The New York company of 10 players takes the audience on a breakneck journey to the rotten core of America. The themes are dealt with satirically and are easily conveyed to British audience. Brian Parks' script is sharp and clever and the simplistic direction adds to the sinister atmosphere of a darkened stage lit with bare light bulbs which illuminate each actor as they speak. Slick and frenetic... It's flawless, although not for the faint-hearted or slow-witted." (Anna Adams, Metro 25/08/00)

"The American Dream gets the legs whipped from under it as Brian Parks delves behind the whitewashed porches of Shafer City - a town that is surreal, dark, and ultimately very funny. Illuminated by roving lightbulbs...the production waits for no-one racing through a comic tale that is both grotesque and sophisticated, turning American icons into trinkets: the playthings of a skilled cast who have perfected their timing, their delivery, and their sense of the absurd." (Robert Thomson, The Herald 25/08/00)

"Borrowing a synopsis from American film, big time capitalist attempts to swallow bourgeois smallholding capitalist, this piece treats like for like, playing each with equivalent ideological malice... Brian Parks' script is as literate as it is ingenious... the playing is splendid... The use of sudden blackouts and rapid transitions makes for deft narrative framing in a production which sees director John Clancy display some clever stagecraft. As prettily structured as a formaldehyde frenzy could be." (Steve Cramer, The List 24/08/00)

"Using little more than handheld lamps and a 100mph delivery, John Clancy's production is a darkly comic compendium of glorious non-sequiturs that knits together the stock types and sacred cows of American culture, and makes them look ridiculous. America may be a mess of hypocrisy and sleaze but that's what makes the country so funny." (Neil Cooper, The Times 22/08/00)

"Its component plays both plumb the depths of corporate malpractice, legal chicanery and family breakdown. Both are staged in a darkness broken only by handheld bulbs, which illuminate scenes in quickfire succession. Brian Parks' writing, and its delivery in John Clancy's production, is highly stylised. It's undeniably dazzling stuff, notably in a series of pyrotechnic soliloquies by which Parks sets upon national or professional mores. A top-notch cast, all perfectly attuned to the production's hyper-sardonic mode. Parks is possessed of a lucid and original comic sense." (Brian Logan, The Independent 21/08/00)

"Sheer relentlessness of delivery. This is a fast show. It's also a virtuoso display of theatrical pyrotechnics. This is satirical social commentary - laughter with meaning. Frenetic." (Iain Macwhirter, Sunday Herald 20/08/00)

"A zany send-up of adolescent dreams and American institutions. Brian Parks' script is sparky and there is a wide-reaching satire. Director John Clancy's staging is classy, his cast slickly doubling as macabre tech crew who huddle round and spotlight each rapid fire scene with flick-on, flick-off lamps." (Kate Bassett, The

Independent on Sunday 20/08/00)

"Clever wit and spark from writer Brian Parks, and a talented ensemble, telling the story of an all-American family whose business gets swallowed up by a corporate take-over...This is fast, perceptive, surreal and funny." (Critics` Choice, The Scotsman 19/08/00)

"Offers excellent evidence that contemporary theatre in the States is also a seed bed of fine satire. The constituent plays Vomit and Roses and Wolverine Dream shed hilarious and razor-sharp light into the dark corners of American society. Politically and historically literate, and dripping with veiled and not-so-veiled references to American literature, Americana Absurdum is a splendidly performed and brilliantly observed comedy." (Mark Brown, Scotland on Sunday 13/08/00)

"I was riveted as 10 players took to the stage for one of the funniest and most surreal performances I've seen. At neck-breaking speed, the play bounced from scene to scene, the action highlighted by swinging spotlights. The humour was black and sailed close to the wind more often than not as the American dream was deftly dissected for all to see. Part II went head to head with a force nine. Tailored for a certain sense of humour and bordering on sick, I thoroughly enjoyed it. No Part III?" (Alison Cockcroft, Scotland on Sunday 13/08/00)

"Brian Parks' uproarious satire of the Land of the Free...An epic performed in two parts on alternate nights, it is a must-see show for anyone who has ever wanted to see Uncle Sam with his trousers down." (Critics Choice, Scotland on Sunday 13/08/00)

"If Americana Absurdum came in a tin it would do exactly as it says on the tin. It would also have two distinct flavours - 'Vomit and Roses' and 'Wolverine Dream'. But they would both taste of five stars and when you had finished one - it wouldn't matter which - you would be livid you had to wait until the next night to taste the other. You would definitely want to taste it for yourself." (Thom Dibdin, Evening News 09/08/00)

"The breakneck pace of the playing adds to the audience's hysteria in this frenetic piece, full of tricky aphorism and surreal visual dislocation. A maudlin and very funny sermon on contemporary American life, this amounts to a memorable evening of theatre." (Steve Cramer, The List, 10/08/00)

"The second of Brian Parks' Absurdum plays is like a rapid-fire standup comedy show that has suddenly gelled into weird dream-like drama. It produces some of the most searingly, wickedly perceptive comic monologues I've heard in years." (Joyce McMillan, The Scotsman 08/08/00)

"A cracking cast and refreshingly mischievous, inventive author. The real target is American callousness, sentimentality and folly; a world where one of those questioned by lunatic lawyers is a wolverine who left its forest family to become a banker. Surreal stuff; but funny and biting too." (Benedict Nightingale, The Times 07/08/00)

"Comically grotesque... biting." (Alexis Greene, Variety)

"The American Dream is blown to smithereens in this joyously dysfunctional account of corporate and family greed... Although the play doesn't shirk at finding the tragic in the freakish, spotlighting the great sickness that is the US has never been quite such fun."(Lyn Gardner, Guardian)

"Perhaps the best combination of playwriting and production to come out of New York downtown theater in the 90s" (Tom Murrin, Paper Magazine)

"A splash of acid fun, transforming delusions, aggressions and insane hate into theatrical joy." (Randy Gener, Village Voice)

production information

Ensemble cast of 9.

2 hours with intermission.

Minimum stage size 15' deep by 22' wide, simple technical needs, all lighting handheld by actors. Venue provides couch, 4'x 8' platform, two tables, nine chairs.

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