

## **It All Works Out at Centerstage**

By Steve Speicher

What do you get when you combine a proofreading office, Chicago hit men, and cows? Centerstage's *Working It Out*, which ties together excerpts from the short plays of three American playwrights, Aaron Sorkin, Rick Cleveland, and Lynn Rosen. Each play is based on the theme of the workplace, and all portray complexities of work in various ways. The show centers on the question of whether we are defined by what we do, making an answer difficult to come by as the action unfolds.

The show opens with Rick Cleveland's *Jerry and Tom*, as we follow two "regular" guys caught up in the mundane, the moral, and their jobs as hit men. With Chicago as their workplace, Jerry (Luke Robertson) and Tom (Vasili Bogazianos) redefine the daily grind and strike a perfect balance between high-stakes and hilarious. Cleveland, staff writer for *Mad Men* and *Nurse Jackie*, shows just how likeable two characters can be, while at the same time absolutely despicable. Even when the action is slow at times, the context and dialogue keep a tenuous edge to the tone in the theater. Robertson's and Bogazianos's performances at first seem stereotypical of what one may think of as Chicago hit men, but soon become so typical that they're genuine. There is a fine line between portraying stereotypes and trying to embody authenticity, and the pair achieve a respectable balance. Tony (John Ramsey) provides comic relief as well as impressive versatility as he plays multiple characters. No stranger to Centerstage, Ramsey has also had a recurring role in *Law & Order*. This play challenges the notion of the typical workplace and takes audiences on a trip into the comical and cunning world of hit men. It makes for a contrasting portrayal of work compared to Lynn Rosen's *Washed Up on the Potomac*, which narrows in on the mundane, yet mysterious life of three D.C.

proofreaders. Carl (Garrett Neergaard), Tina (Katie Jeffries), Ruth (Amy Hohn), and Deb (Kate Buddeke) bring the action to the office, as they're stricken with the memory of a coworker who disappeared. The struggle is this; take full-time employment and sentence themselves to suffocating security or break out and pursue their passions. This play strikes a vein among all of us, especially those who have worked in a 9 to 5 office environment. It provokes the human desire for comfort, predictability, and security, while also flirting with our inner yearning to leave what we know, and go for what we want.

Out of the three plays, the performances seemed most stilted in *Potomac*. Neergaard and Jeffries were positioned to the left and right of center stage and sat at the most prominent desks in the office. However, their acting wasn't as outstanding as their positioning on stage. The delivery and timing of many lines seemed slightly phony, although that may have been the actors' intention. The banter was only a little humorous, and part of me yearned to break out of the office, only after being in it for 20 minutes.

Finally, Aaron Sorkin's *Hidden in this Picture* served as the crowning jewel to *Working It Out*, positioning audiences on a farm in Upstate New York, on which a film shoot is taking place. This play aims to satirize the work of movie-making and does so brilliantly, through absurdist notions about what works and fast-paced dialogue. However, *Picture* would have failed without the energy of the actors. In this play more than the others, the tightness and shared relationship between the performers is consistent from the first line to the last. The most notable performance, however, is the Robert, the director, played by Joseph Wycoff, making his Centerstage debut. Forget what you may think about first-times, because for Wycoff's start at Centerstage, he makes quite the initial impression. His authenticity and charisma in becoming Robert leave audiences

with the perception that Wycoff really is Robert the director. He blurs the line between actor and character. Of all in *Working It Out*, Wycoff became his character so much that you half-expected to go chat with Robert about the scene in the shoot, at the post-performance reception held behind the theater bar. Centerstage can certainly look forward to more captivating performances from Wycoff.

Without an intermission and running just under 90 minutes, *Working It Out* is a great merger of various workplaces and challenges notions of what it means to work, and what it feels like to play. By weaving together three plays, this production overall, works out.

*Working It Out* is directed by Jason Loewith and was at Centerstage March 3-28. For my information go to [www.centerstage.org](http://www.centerstage.org)