

Theater Review: 'Assassination Theater' Digs Too Many Rabbit Holes

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 17, 2015 - 6:42am

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CHICAGO – There are two dates in modern American History that ring in the heads of certain generations. Of course, there is September 11th, 2001, but the granddaddy of that date is November 22nd, 1963. That is when an American president, John F. Kennedy, was shot point blank in the head and killed on the street of an American city. The official proclamation from the government is that a lone assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, fired those shots. In a new Chicago play, "Assassination Theater," subtitled "Chicago's Role in the Crime of the Century," the jury is still decidedly out.



Play Rating: **3.5/5.0**

The play is presented lecture style, with audio/visual screens and actors portraying some of the most notorious characters associated with the assassination, and is a complex presentation regarding the labyrinth of circumstances and people who could have been involved with the crime, including a former Chicago mobster who confessed to a former FBI agent that he was the main shooter. The artful production is a blizzard of facts and figures, digging too rabbit holes for too many 'Alices' to go down. Where they lead becomes less apparent, as the information accumulates.



Hillel Levin (Michael Joseph Mitchell, left) and the Cast Presents Its Case in 'Assassination Theater'

Photo credit: Michael Brosilow

The play begins with a pristine and still shocking unspooling of the infamous “Zapruder Film,” the home movie by a Texas clothing manufacturer that captured the JFK assassination in Dallas in all its vivid headshot gore. This leads to the lecturer (Michael Joseph Mitchell), who stands in for the play’s author, Hillel Levin. He is joined by Zach Shelton (Mark Ulrich), the aforementioned former FBI agent who took the confession of the Chicago mobster. As the story unfolds, two actors (Ryan Kitley, Martin Yurek) portray various political and criminal characters, starkly recreating their actual dialogue in association with the assassination. In two acts, an alternate history of what happened is revealed.

In the way director Kevin Christopher Fox has staged the play, it feels like the best lecture you were privy to in college. Michael Joseph Mitchell is lively and passionate as Levin, and the audio/visual presentation on the large screens surrounding him add to the complex story (there were actual gasps when the Zapruder Film was shown in that large screen proportion, even though there are 1000 ways to analyze it on YouTube). His cohort, Mark Ulrich as Zack Shelton, is less interesting, but he is also doing the leg work throughout the proceedings, and often speaks to the actors playing the characters. Those two talented men create a vibrant atmosphere of politics and crime, often combining the two when portraying certain politicians.

There is a notion, though, of being talked to death. The complexity of the mob presence is a reminder of the line from “Monty Python and the Holy Grail”...“Let’s not bicker and argue about who killed who...” Yep, it seems like every few minutes another one bites the dust, and it begins with the handsome and popular president. My take is that the evidence trail is colder than absolute zero after nearly 52 years, and somebody (the government) wanted it that way. It now all comes down to theory and confessional speculation, and despite an overwhelming amount of testimony presented in “Assassination Theater,” JFK is still dead, and the history that has come to America since that death has buried the truth like it was under a falling tower on a September day.



The Lone Gunman Looms Large Over Actors Mark Ulrich and Martin Yurek in 'Assassination Theater'

Photo credit: Michael Brosilow

It's not that the show is bad, it's just becomes about why it continues to obsess us, when the real truth at this point – whether Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, or with a group of co-conspirators or with the mob – doesn't matter. History and the information available has proven mostly that the law enforcement authorities botched the investigation, starting with allowing the man who could possibly know everything (Oswald) to be shot down like a dog, in cold blood, on national television. The plea at the end of the play is to do something about it, but today's politicians are too busy being bought off by their own special interests. “JFK assassination? Put on your tinfoil hat, and call me next week.”

There was a hilarious faux poem that was published about the assassination by National Lampoon magazine in the 1970s, that pretty much sums up the whole absurdity of what happened on 11/22/63. “An eagle flies in the Texas sun/Through starry skies in the Texas sun.”

The world premiere of “Assassination Theater: Chicago’s Role in the Crime of the Century” is produced by Hillel Levin at the Museum of Broadcast Communication, 360 N. State Street, Chicago – Wednesday-Sunday through November 7th, 2015. [Click here](#) [20] for more information and to purchase tickets. Featuring Michael Joseph Mitchell, Mark Ulrich, Ryan Kitley and Martin Yurek. Written by Hillel Levin. Directed by Kevin Christopher Fox.



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