

Director's Concept Statement--Jenny McConnell Frederick

TRUTH & BEAUTY BOMBS: A SOFTER WORLD

September 2015

Concept

TRUTH & BEAUTY BOMBS: A SOFTER WORLD is an original, full-length work for stage that I conceived of in 2014 and directed in the fall of 2015. The work was inspired by the web comic asofterworld.com created by Canadian artists Emily Horne and Joey Comeau. I had been captivated by the web comic for years. Emily and Joey combined still photos with text to capture a brief moment in time, an epic thought or a triviality. Their works had a clear link to the aesthetic that my company, Rorschach Theatre is known for--dark wit, magic and vivid world-building. I was interested in using their work as a jumping off point to create the world they hint at and to conjure the characters that their work only provides glimpses of.



It was essential that the world of this play feel like our own world--but different--a world where monsters and magic were de rigueur, love was a tangible thing and death was nothing to fear.

Development

I began by assembling a team of playwrights that included my co-Artistic Director Randy Baker, along with Helen Hayes Award Winner Norman Allen, Pulitzer Prize Nominee Heather McDonald, Washington Post Columnist Alexandra Petri and playwright and composer Shawn Northrip. Each writer was given one [asofterworld](http://asofterworld.com) comic and asked to use

it as a launch point for writing a short script that could be divided into three sections. (The format of the scripts was intended to mimic the structure of the comic.) The cast of twelve



was assembled by invitation and roles were built with their traits and skill sets in mind. Each playwright was assigned 2-4 actors for whom they were to create roles. As the scripts came to fruition, Baker and I assembled them into a cohesive text by interspersing stories. For the next six weeks, Baker and I continued to develop his section of the text--the framing device intended to link the other stories.

Design

The look and feel of the world required reality--with an edge. Costumes were designed to feel modern but with a timeless, often androgynous slant. Sexuality, gender and time were all fluid concepts within the rules of this world. The physical world of the play disrupted reality in several key ways. First audiences entered through the backstage loading dock for the Lang Theatre at the Atlas Performing Arts Center. The loading dock and backstage area was transformed into a 80's vintage patio (complete with astro-turf) and rec room celebrating the comics themselves in various manifestations--decoupage to a coffee table, displayed on an old TV, hung on the wall as art. After passing through the installation, guests found themselves on stage looking out into the 260-seat house in the Lang. As the audience took their seats on the stage, they could see into a run-down laundromat, and just past the walls of the laundromat, a chasm of darkness. As the stories began to unfold and intertwine, the audience





met bank-robbers in love, travelers at the edge of mortality, a couple trying to survive the apocalypse and a mysterious photographer who might be setting the world on fire. As the play reached its climax, the young woman, obsessed with the laundromat decides she must burn it down. Through a savvy collaboration of lights and sound, the whole set began to flicker and seemingly burn. The upstage

walls began to sway forward on their foundations and then, without warning they broke loose and flew--for a split second straight toward the audience before floating sky-ward and disappearing. As the play neared its conclusion hanging lights began to illuminate the darkness up and beyond the stage. Most of the cast assembled in the house, bringing life into what had been a void. The two remaining cast members remained on stage, looking out toward the house and contemplating the unknown. This final moment completed the picture and brought the full world of the play into focus by using every aspect of the room.

Overall, TRUTH & BEAUTY BOMBS represented a valuable milestone as Rorschach Theatre's first original full-length production created by and for the company.



“Rorschach Theatre’s brilliant new play... Truth & Beauty Bombs lights the world on fire and dances in the flames. It destroys preconceived notions and offers a new, poetic language for philosophical discussions of life and death.”

-DC Theatre Scene

All photos by Ryan Maxwell

Photography