

**“See ABDICATION if you’re a fan of
THE TWILIGHT ZONE or BLACK MIRROR”**



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The tongue-in-cheek anthology, *Abdication!*, will be a featured event for the 10th anniversary THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY DREAM UP FESTIVAL 2019. Performances will be at the Johnson Theater Space at 155 First Avenue (between 9th and 10th Streets), New York City on 09/03: Tuesday, 9pm; 09/04: Wednesday, 6:30pm; 09/05: Thursday, 9pm; 09/06: Friday, 6:30pm; and 09/07: Saturday, 8pm. <https://abdication.brownpapertickets.com/>

Abdication! written by Naya James, directed by Lucia Bellini, produced by Lucia Bellini, Naya James and Trenton Clark, sports a Multi-Media Team that includes Raylla Chan (Animator) and Loredanna Vacario (AV tech) and is the first presentation of Three-Headed Lion Productions. It's fitting to have a multi-media team when your show is a multi-cultural, multi-media dark comedy more than reminiscent of *Black Mirror*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and VR.

Abdication! delivers a tongue-in-cheek three-episode anthology shining a light on social media, human interaction, and finally - as depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale* - lack of individualism. These *Black Mirror*-type tales illustrate potential versions of what life will look like if we give away even more of our autonomy in exchange for convenience. What makes this company so forward thinking and what makes this series of plays so fascinating is that it sits on a scale where fantasy and reality are evenly matched.

Abdication! manages to depict technocratic society not only with dystopian gloom, but with a heavy dose of wit and comedy.

Ripped from the headlines of lonely people all over the world marrying their VR "girlfriend" or simply checking out of reality (called "going into the goo" in this episode), *STUCK* - through wry humor and charm - shares how a close-knit Italian-American family grapples with the idea that one of its family members plans to remove from society by hooking up full-time to a virtual reality network. What dreams may come.

Riffing on the news stories of how people are now having less sex thus fewer children, *LOVE LOBOTOMY* relates the story of two hapless souls deciding to undergo Amigdalar Resurfacing, (a "Love Lobotomy") making them immune to romantic feelings and more productive... maybe.

Running alongside *A Handmaid's Tale*, *COLOR SCHEME* takes us to a society where everyone has been classified into a specific color-red, green, blue, etc., and the implementation of this system has ostensibly led to perfect harmony. Until someone mixes and matches.

Filled with gallows-humor, song, dance, and multi-media, each episode shows how abdication of a portion of human existence pulls a piece out of the house of cards that we call our lives.

Appearing in this triumvirate of techno-tales is Amanda Cannon, Trenton Clark, Alan Cordoba, Janet Donofrio, Naya James, Stephen Keyes, Cesar Lozada, Mike Ivers, Sid Ross, Meredith Rust, Tony Scheer, and Topher Wallace.

The production/design Team is an amalgam of theatre and video professionals: Naya James (playwright); Lucia Bellini (director); Charles Casano (stage manager); Raylla Chan (animator); Loredanna Vacario (AV tech) and Trenton Clark (producer).

The Three-Headed Lions themselves:

Writer Naya James is a writer/actor/producer in New York City. She is a resident actor and writer in the Wednesday Repertory Company and owner of Anjali Productions, an independent film production company focused on stories of the evolution of human consciousness. Writing credits include 12 original one-act plays produced in festivals all over New York, including Theater 54, The Paradise Factory, The Algonquin, and the Richmond Shepard Theater, and three short films, which she also produced. Naya can be seen this summer as the lead in the film "Indigo" by Garfield Boston, and this September in the World Premiere of *Abdication!* at Theater for the New City, which she wrote and co-produced.

Director Lucia Bellini aka "Lu" is a director/actor for film and theatre originally from Viareggio, Italy. Member of Wednesday Repertory Company and NY Madness. Lu is proud to have won the award for Outstanding Direction of a Staged Reading for *Who Mourns For Bob The Goon?* at the 2015 Planet Connection Festivities, followed by a run of the show at the HERE Arts Center in the Summer of 2016. Her collaboration with the Festivities continued assisting Glory Kadigan for PFAC 2017 and 2018. Recent credits include direction of the 2018 Planet Connection Festivities Award Ceremony at the Abrons Arts Center's Playhouse Theatre, direction of Naya James' one act play *Stuck* for Wednesday Repertory Company and assistant director to Glory Kadigan for *The Floor is Lava* at La Mama Experimental Theatre.

Producer Trenton Clark is an actor/writer/director in New York City. He is a member of and resident director with the Wednesday Repertory Company, for which he has mounted several one-act plays. A graduate of the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in NY, he has studied the craft for over 20 years on both coasts, as well as his home state of New Mexico. New York Theater credits: *Hamlet, Hamlet*; *Lucius, Titus Andronicus* (Hudson Warehouse); *Rope*; *The Head Hunter*; *Wilde Nights* (St. Francis College). Tours: *42nd Street*. Regional and other: *42nd Street*, *Beauty & the Beast* (Papermill Theater); *Happily Whatever After* (New World Stages Hollywood, LA). In addition to *Abdication!* Trenton is currently developing a television series based on a true story of murder and corruption. Stay tuned.



The fictional story collection Mumm’s Tales of Abdication serves as the source for three “episodes” tied together by a singing, dancing Narrator (Trenton Clark) in the style of a 60’s or 70’s TV variety show. In the first piece, a loser from Staten Island horrifies his family by announcing his plans to sign up for a full-time, 33-month virtual reality experiment compared to The Matrix. Next up, two patients at the Northwest Psychosurgical Institute decide to give romance one last try before submitting to an “amygdala-resurfacing” procedure known colloquially as a “love lobotomy.” And in the final episode, set in a near alternative future, a woman takes a five hour bus ride to her nearest Spectrum Bureau to petition to have her color changed—from purple to orange.

Abdication! reminded me a lot of those old stop-action animated Christmas specials—like the one where Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer visits the Snow Miser. It also brought to mind Monty Python’s Flying Circus, sans the English accents and with a decidedly more in-your-face sense of humor. Just like the singer M.I.A. wrote songs about important issues that sound like they’re about nothing, playwright Naya James’ script expertly tackles pertinent philosophical considerations about modern technology with the satirical craftsmanship of a stand-up comedian.

Intermixing low-res 4:3 video on a big ol’ tube television with alternating vignettes on an otherwise empty stage, the perfectly-cast actors (under the direction of Lucia Bellini) had the whole audience cracking up, myself included.

Currently part of Theater for the New City’s Dream Up Festival, not only do I hope Abdication! reappears with a run of its own, I’d love to see it expand into an ongoing series, perhaps with a different theme each month, but always hearkening back to the days of analog television comedy variety shows.



Review Fix chats with the team behind the upcoming production of *Abdication!*, to find out what makes it a special one and why it may be the sleeper hit of this upcoming Fall theater season.

About the Production:

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Review Fix:
What was the inspiration for this project?

Naya James: This project came together largely as a response to walking the streets of Manhattan and being bombarded at every turn by advertisements for products that promise to improve one's life, both blatantly and subtly. This persistent message to be more, do more, have more resulted in me wanting to explore the lives of people who feel broken on the inside because they are often unable to participate in a competitive and hyper-“productive” society. So often, heroes of tales are the ones who accomplish and achieve the most, at all costs. I wanted to tell the story of what some of those costs actually are—and I wanted to use the backdrop of a technocracy, which only escalates these expectations to be better and faster.

Lucia Bellini: It all started at the end of our latest showcase with *WedRepCo*, in which I had directed Naya's piece called *Stuck*, at the time still a standalone one-act. During the closing-night mandatory drinking session we talked about how much we wished the plays could be seen by a larger audience and still had a life after the showcase. Epiphany struck and from the plethora of plays Naya had written through the years we realized there were two more that combined with *Stuck* would in fact make a perfect *Black Mirror*esque trilogy. Fast forward about two weeks later... *Abdication!* was in the festival. Our motto since then has been just keep plowing through.

Trenton Clark: When Naya and Lu first approached me about *Abdication!*, there was this concept of stitching together these thematically similar short plays (we've come to call them episodes) into one cohesive piece with an identity and perspective all its own. Achieving this would mean we'd be challenging what so many people have come to accept as "the norm" in terms of presentation style, play structure, and narrative in theatre. We would be pushing ourselves beyond the limits of our own comfort zones. I mean, let's be honest, it isn't every day you see a straight play that uses music, singing, dance, multimedia, and cartoons to tell its story. As an actor and artist, I've always felt that that extra push—into the realm of the unknown and uncomfortable—can inspire truly unfiltered creativity. It was the confidence of this writer-director team in the face of the unknown and unexplored, that really attracted me to the production. I thought, "That sounds like a lot, and I know we can do it."

Review Fix: Which came first the cautionary tale or the fantasy element?

Naya James: In the process of the storytelling, they became one and the same. Because every time I projected from today's zeitgeist into a near-future fantasy or alternate reality, the tales from that world just automatically felt cautionary.

Lucia Bellini: The thing that struck me the most about the plays from the very start was how very human every character is despite being in a fantastical world. The cautionary element came out of the pieces naturally considering the theme that each episode examines in the current state of things IRL.

Trenton Clark: In the beginning, what resonated with me was how clearly and completely the different worlds of the play had been conceived. The notion that the worlds—or realities—in each episode are just other possible versions of our own (only with a twist) gave me this sense of connectedness to the material. Each world is accessible and familiar. So when we learn of Tommy's need to escape his life and his family to "go into the Goo", or Mara's need to surgically excise her ability to love in order to move on with her life, or Viola's need to risk her freedom and attempt to get reassigned as one of the Orange elite, it's easy enough to follow along and root for them. We are able to buy into these characters' fantasies and hopes and dreams because they feel real. For me, the cautionary tale aspect comes home to roost after each episode is over,

when the audience is left wondering, "What's more unbelievable: the worlds these people inhabit or the audacity with which they dare to dream?"

Review Fix: What did you learn/are learning about yourself through this process?

Naya James: One of the most important lessons I've learned, and is reinforced for me daily, is that it doesn't matter how talented or intelligent you are if you don't have amazing people to collaborate with. This has certainly been a labor of love for all involved—and just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes one to raise a good show! And I am very grateful for the village I'm part of.

Lucia Bellini: How everything that happens in your life (personal and professional) can then become a crucial little tile in a future situation. This has been quite the revelation in this process, no matter how simple that may sound. Something that might seem totally irrelevant or painful or even dull or silly in the moment could have the power and potential to help you later. Any experience rarely goes to waste if attention is paid. In a more practical sense I have also learnt that I am actually capable of doing a bit of video editing on my own which I thought impossible up until a few months ago, and considering it's always been one of my favorite parts of the process, I am finally – slowly – giving myself the freedom to put together a sequence chomping in my head without always having to rely on someone else. Hopefully practice will make perfect.

Trenton Clark: Collaborating on *Abdication!* has been full of surprises. Everybody comes to the table with different strengths and weaknesses. Learning how to let go of preconceptions and being willing and even excited to relinquish parts of the creative process to other artists has been an enlightening experience.

Review Fix: What are your ultimate goals for this piece for the future?

Naya James: The ultimate goal is for as many people to experience this show as possible, hopefully with a long-standing run. This piece explores a lot of topical themes and challenges that people are struggling with every day, and sometimes the best salve for that is to get together in a space and have that shared experience.

Lucia Bellini: La Mama! Broadway! Ultimately a space where a larger fun set can be built would be great. But I trust Naya's writing as well as our actors completely so I am confident the stories will come alive regardless.

Trenton Clark: Ultimately, a Broadway run. Our goal is to have a home base, a theater space that would enable us to further develop the visual and physical world of the play. We had some pretty "out there" ideas for the set design and technical elements of the show, ideas we look forward to exploring in the future. The show has the potential to reach a wide variety of audiences with whom it engages in a discussion about our willingness to give up control for an easier experience. But life isn't about easy.

Review Fix: What's next for the show and the company?

Naya James: Abdication! will run September 3rd-September 7th as part of the Dream Up Festival. Post-festival, we hope to take this show onward to a more permanent space. As for the company, we have a few other exciting projects coming up—a short film in post-production and another to be shot in the fall, and a new full-length play, also with science fiction elements, to begin workshopping in the winter.

Lucia Bellini: Naya has a new full-length play in the works which hopefully we'll start workshopping in the Fall. After the festival we'll also start post-production on a short film we shot this July and we have more short stories that could also potentially be a good fit for the screen. We have all the intentions and material to keep ourselves busy. The collaboration with Naya and Trenton so far has been the most productive, creativity-inducing process that I have never been a part of. I hope we'll continue this path.

Trenton Clark: Well, first things first. The show opens on September 3rd, so right now the company is focused on that. Beyond the Dream Up Festival, the sky is the limit. We will continue to collaborate with all the various artists involved to develop the show further. And waiting in the wings, another full-length play, a possible television show, and we are finishing post-production on the company's first short film.

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The Lions of 21st Century Live Art *Jay Michaels, the host of Terror Talk* *on Terror TV conducted the interview*



Naya James, Lucia (“Lu”) Bellini, and Trenton Clark are the pride of lions that make up THREE-HEADED LION PRODUCTIONS. Amassing decades of experience between them, Bellini, James, and Clark (sounds like a law firm, no?) have appeared, directed, produced, and studied with some of the leading names in independent art: Wednesday Repertory Company (where Trent is a resident director), Anjali Productions, an independent film production company (Naya is an owner), Theater 54, The Paradise Factory, The Algonquin, Richmond Shepard Theater, NY Madness, Planet Connection Festivities (where Lu is an award-winner), HERE Arts Center, Abrons Arts Center, Hudson Warehouse, Papermill Theater, New World Stages Hollywood, and La Mama Experimental Theatre.

Makes sense that they would join forces to create their own theatrical hub.

The team opens their first production at another laudable festival: Theatre for the New City’s Dream-Up Festival.

Combining all their talents and tastes, *Abdication!* Is a blend of Retro TV, cutting edge “downtown” art, timely topics, brilliant writing, directing, and acting, and some gallows humor thrown-in. *Abdication!* is three fantasy based tales on what happens when we [willingly] give up our identity. Imagine Orwell’s 1984 spiced with *Handmaid’s Tale* and *Black Mirror*.

I took the reins of interviewing the Lions due to my devotion to all things macabre.

OK, let’s start with intros... tell us about yourselves as artists.

NAYA JAMES: First and foremost, I regard myself as a storyteller. There are many different ways to tell a story of course—my main mediums are writing and acting, others do it through technical design or directing, etc. But I feel that any valuable narrative art has to service the story above all. Because it is the story that brings people together, lets them experience something as one and create a shared energy space. To me, that is what we in film and theater should always be striving for and what I aim to do as an artist.

LU BELLINI: I started out as a ballet dancer when I was about 3 years old and I remember being so fascinated from that very young age by my teachers and choreographers creating and guiding us all. I would be so proud of being part of the group of people coming into the theatre from the backstage door. It’s like all of a sudden, I knew something mysterious and magical that nobody else could know about. I would ask my mother: “can I please pretty please put up my own dancing recital?” Of course not. I was 6. Maybe 7. Still no. Shortly after I got bit by the acting bug, and it still itches today. But that was not quite enough to fill that “let’s-come up with new ideas make a show tell some jokes and use music to recreate a feeling a situation a though” hole in my heart. It started to fill up when by accident I ended up co-directing for Bad Babies Films. I did research and read books and studied and practiced and I am of course still doing that today. So I would say that myself as an artist is that part of me that searches and listens out for new pieces of information every chance I get to add to my little baggage of knowledge, to then put to practice and experiment, make it my own when I can. Practice, practice, practice. I am not the kind of artist that think I was simply born with a miraculous talent and that I should just go out and spread my amazing gift into the world (you would be surprised by how much I hear stuff like that or along those lines). And plus, why not? I love reading and talking about theatre, and film, and directing techniques, and acting techniques, I find it truly interesting. And if I have to be responsible for a group of 15, 20, or however many people, I owe it to them to be as prepared as I can be. Same goes if I am acting in something, you’re not alone and what you do and what you bring to the table touches so many other people that might not even be in the room in that moment.

TRENTON CLARK: I started doing theatre when I was in high school. A friend of mine had seen the audition posting for the upcoming spring musical—that year was *Anything Goes*—and maybe she thought I would be really good, or perhaps she just wanted to get me to stop humming and singing my way around campus. Either way she marched with me over to the call board and practically put my name down for me. And that was that. I was cast as ensemble and got my first real dose of theatre. Despite spending much of my time in the Musical Theatre world, I really found my passion for the arts in the acting studio. I loved studying the text. I quickly adopted my mother’s father’s appreciation for Shakespeare; I’ve even carted his aging, hardback copies of the Bard’s works across the country with me—three times. I moved to New York to study the craft at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy. I graduated. I worked professionally in regional theaters and tap danced (something I had never done before going to school in NY) my way across Asia in a production of *42nd Street*. I was told I should try TV, so I moved to Los Angeles. It was during my time on the west coast that I really began exploring and pushing the limits of my creativity; I did a movie musical, I worked on a green screen project. I’ve grown to love those elements of storytelling that really push the imagination.

What’s your creative process and how do you make the fantasy elements real?

NAYA JAMES: My creative process as a writer is to just try to participate in life as much as possible. To notice the things happening around me. People and the environment are connected in many significant ways that you might miss if you’re not paying attention—so I just try to pay attention, to observe people and situations. From doing this, stories and ideas tend to arise organically. In everything I create, I try to ground it in the reality of the human experience as much as possible. Regarding fantasy, it doesn’t matter if you’re a character in middle earth in the beginning of days, or a character living on Mars hundreds of years from now—your fundamental human emotions and need for love, community, connection and security will always be the same. So as long as characters feel and exhibit truthful behavior, it doesn’t matter how fantastical the imaginary setting is.

LU BELLINI: Any fantasy element can easily become real if you treat it as such. If you think about it, any reality can be a fantasy for someone else and vice versa. I find it a matter of being able and willing to put yourself in the required proverbial shoes. It can’t harm if you’re stuck with the imagination and curiosity of a small child. First step of the process: having a good relationship with the script (and the playwright). I must love it and believe in it and it has to make sense for me, for my sensibility, humor, etc. I am not fit to direct or act in anything under the sun. With time I found that some things are better fit than others (like most people I am sure). As a director I usually then start to compile visual and musical references for myself and for the rest of team I am working with so we can all start “seeing” the show slowly emerging from the fog. I keep an open mind and more often than not things change quite a bit from those first concepts. Better ideas and/or more effective ways of telling the story might come from anywhere at any time. Not to mention the world of logistics and staying on time/budget which will try your imagination and general process really good. Reason why I find it crucial to have a team you trust and that you feel comfortable with around you. It is sometimes in time of trouble that true imagination and collaboration happen and shine.

TRENTON CLARK: I always start with the text. I’ve learned over the years that you can study and study and study a script, and there are always more surprises. It’s amazing what information can be pulled from the writer’s chosen words. After learning the script inside and out, the next thing has always been to play; make that weird choice—in the moment. It may not be the best choice but it’ll teach you something, about the material, or about yourself, often both. Fantasy comes alive when you’re uninhibited and unfiltered. The courage to take that risk and do the uncomfortable often results in the most amazing discoveries. In that state of constant discovery, the fantasy is kept alive for me.

How do you inject humor without losing the message?

LU BELLINI: I don’t think comedy and humor would cause any message to be lost. If anything, I believe it might help getting people to listen or to even get the message across without even realizing there was a message in the first place.

NAYA JAMES: A lot of times humor is the message. For example, “laughter through tears” can be seen as the quintessential human behavior—we are complex emotional individuals, and our ability to find humor and nuance in grim or challenging situations has historically been one of our best coping mechanisms.

TRENTON CLARK: Well, never try to be funny. Again, going to the script will almost always show you where the humor lies. And humor is complicated; it isn’t just slapstick, it isn’t just punchlines, it’s ironies and tragedies and so much more. Then there’s the humor that comes with discomfort. I stick with the message and commit to my choices and the humor flows from things naturally.

I’ve always felt that anything fantasy, sci-fi and horror are cautionary tales. What’s your opinion?

LU BELLINI: I agree. Even if they don’t intend to be. They tap into those big “as ifs” and “what if that happened IRL” and “what would I do if” and they get the conversation going and your wheels turning. “what if” can be a very powerful question.

NAYA JAMES: I believe it depends on what exactly you’re attempting to caution people against. Pieces in the fantasy, sci-fi or horror genres can absolutely serve as warnings to people of potential or future danger. But in other stories, a more utopian or aspirational alternative can be presented. In these instances, they can have the opposite effect, encouraging people not to proceed with caution but rather to barrel full steam ahead. And sometimes there’s a special hybrid, cautionary tale and heartwarming Utopia story all at once—which is why a movie like Avatar was so popular!

TRENTON CLARK: So much of human storytelling is cautionary. Warnings of creatures to be feared, stalking in the dark have always been whispered across the campfire. Zombies, one of my favorite creature-villains, are arguably the most utilized characterizations of our fear throughout modernity. Representative of illness, disease, contagion, and death, Zombies teach us to be cautious of infections and new “miracle cures”, the depths of the jungle and crowded public places, and perhaps most of all ourselves and the horrors we are capable of. StarTrek teaches us that no matter how advanced our society may become, we are still human and prone to err.

What next?

NAYA JAMES: To continue working with my fabulous collaborators. To develop this show to its ultimate creative vision, and hopefully find it a more permanent home. After that, more plays, films, and multimedia. As my production partner says, I am a “bottomless pit of ideas.” So just getting those ideas to fruition in attempt to connect relevant stories to as many people as we can.

LU BELLINI: I am looking forward to seeing Abdication! finally on stage and how to improve it from there. I also can’t wait to start working on Naya’s new full-length play, and who knows... maybe jump on stage, myself, for a bit?

TRENTON CLARK: I write, I direct, I act. Abdication! will continue to see development and I see a lot more beyond that on the horizon.

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Robert Viagas in the Twilight Zone ... with ABDICATION Abdication! By Naya James Reviewed by Robert Viagas

Millennials get a bad rap for their supposed propensity to tune in (to their cell phones) and drop out (of jobs and relationships). But *Abdication!*, Naya James' new triptych of one-act plays about the phenomenon, brings insight, humor and a touch of science-fiction to the phenomenon—which is by no means restricted to any single age group

Having its New York premiere as part of Theatre for a New City's 2019 "Dream Up" Festival, *Abdication!* tells three micro-"Twilight Zone" stories of people willing to go to extremes in vain attempts to flee their unhappy lives.

Stuck is set in a society where people can "go into the goo"—slang for hooking themselves up to the full virtually reality of their choosing. The comedy arises when a nerdy young Italian-American man tries to explain to his close-knit sitcom family (over dinner, of course) why he has decided to take this radical step. They prefer to think that finding the right girl will cure his unhappiness.

The second playlet, *Love Lobotomy*, takes things a step further. Two people who meet at a clinic to undergo "Amigdalar Resurfacing," (a.k.a. a "Love Lobotomy") to make them immune to love, actually fall in love right there in the waiting room. We then go with them as their relationship poignantly blossoms, then withers, then dies. In the end, they're back at the clinic, sadder but wiser. The play is subtitled "A Tragi-comedy in 3 Episodes" and this segment gets closer to the heart than the others, thanks especially to author Naya James onstage as the disappointment-bound young woman.

The third short play, *Color Scheme*, takes place in a dystopian "near alternative future" where everyone has been sorted into color-coded groups based on their personalities. The play chronicles the Kafkaesque battle of a "Purple" (passive?) woman who feels she ought to be an "Orange" (pushy, rude, and a little crazy?) and collides with a "Grey" (officious and bossy?) who is determined to keep Purple purple. The question marks are there because the play offers only glimpses about how each color is defined, though anyone can relate to the lady in purple's struggle against bureaucracy. As Viola, Meredith Rust makes us feel her anguish.

The evening is narrated in song by a top-hatted Astaire-like host (Trenton Clark) who is backed up by two largely silent comic goons (Stephen Keyes and Topher Wallace). Though these segments need polishing, they help maintain the show's alternately funny and bleak tone.

The cast also features Amanda Cannon, Alan Cordoba, Janet Donofrio, Cesar Lozada, Mike Ivers, Sid Ross, and Tony Scheer.

Directed by Lucia Bellini, *Abdication!* played a limited run through September 7 at the TFTNC's Johnson Theater Space in the East Village section of Manhattan.



OuterStage

A featured event for the 10th anniversary THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY DREAM UP FESTIVAL 2019 is Abdication! Filled with gallows-humor, song, dance, and multi-media, the show is a triumvirate of short plays episode shows how abdication of a portion of human existence pulls a piece out of the house of cards that we call our lives. Heady stuff, huh?

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Don't watch these in the dark! Oh, wait a minute ... you have to... it's a live theater event:

STUCK: a close-knit Italian-American family grapples with the idea that one of its family members plans to remove from society by hooking up full-time to a virtual reality network.

LOVE LOBOTOMY relates the story of two hapless souls deciding to undergo Amigdalar Resurfacing, (a "Love Lobotomy") making them immune to romantic feelings and more productive... maybe.

And finally, COLOR SCHEME takes us to a society where everyone has been classified into a specific color-red, green, blue, etc., and the implementation of this system has ostensibly led to perfect harmony. Until someone mixes and matches.

Cast member, Topher Wallace, explains how his acting ability comes from ... baking.

"I am an artist through and through. No matter what medium. With a background of professional baking and pastry, I was able to create art using all five senses. I believe that theater can be the same. Also, with my design and style, playing with the inner turmoil of one's life can elevate the art to a whole medium. With a type of background that I had growing up, I believe art can be one of the best therapies for healing."



His creative process is certainly a philosophical one.

There is a light within darkness, there is darkness within light. I believe no matter what story or artistic piece one is trying to convey. I believe to create a three-dimensional world and character you have to have both darkness and light and all the shades in between.

His characterizations are dark and light as well.

With my character set up, it is supposed to break the tension of the story but move it forward. From a light-hearted song and dance man to a cold-hearted government agent. The emotions are true and solid, I personally laugh in extremely serious situations. That is a character flaw, but many people understand it.

Somehow he compares the show's fantasy element to Little Red Riding Hood, the Greco-Roman Empires ... and special brownies!

When it comes to fiction, it does have a base of reality. The best example is in the fable of Little Red Riding Hood, coming from back in the Greek or Roman empire. Telling the story of striving off the path can ultimately lead to your demise, also talking to strangers can be dangerous. There are many morals one can learn. But I learned if you see a talking wolf... just run, or realizing the brownies you just ate that are for granny are not for children.

In the end, he stays toward the light.

What's next? Not 100% certain. I have a few projects that I am currently working on including an app. But hopefully, the future is bright.

Drama-Queens

Women of the Arts 2019: Naya James & Lucia Bellini – Celebrating Two Art Entrepreneurs

Posted on August 20 by Natasha Dawsen, Editor

It speaks volumes when word of a particular show peeks its head out of the sea of well-done works at a prominent festival like Theater for the New City's Dream Up.

In this case, that show is ABDICATION! Handing us on stage chills and giggles like you'd find in a quality Black Mirror episode and the don't-let-this-happen thoughts we see around The Handmaid's Tale, the live anthology show, Abdication!, is a multi-cultured, multi-media dark comedy looking like more than just a featured event at the 10th anniversary THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY DREAM UP FESTIVAL 2019 but a really hot ticket. Limited run at TNC's Johnson Theater at 155 First Avenue (between 9th and 10th Streets) in New York City. It opens and runs right after Labor Day – 09/03 @ 9pm; 09/04 @ 6:30pm; 09/05 @ 9pm; 09/06 @ 6:30pm; and 09/07 @ 8pm.

Three-Headed Lion Productions. Two of those heads are Naya James and Lucia Bellini (with Trenton Clark as the completing head). We wanted to show our support to these two entrepreneurs on the start of their new show ... new company ... new beginning.

I've had so many different answers to this question, so I look forward to your answers.

What's it like to be a woman in the arts in NYC?

Lu: First off, I feel very lucky to be able to call myself and be addressed as "a woman in the arts in NYC." Total life goal vibes here. Look Ma! But that aside... there's a big responsibility that comes with being a woman in the arts today. Or a woman in anything really. We fought so hard to get where we are that I believe it is our duty to take full advantage and cherish any opportunity to create and be heard. I am not gonna lie, the pressure is palpable. There's always that little voice in your head that tries to trick you into thinking you that you are here to prove that you are as

smart, that you are as strong, that you are as—fill in the blank—as a man would have been in your place. I have also noticed on more than one occasion that if something bad happens or someone treats you wrong people go to this question: do you think that would have happened if you had been a man? Or if something good or lucky happens: do you think that would have happened if you hadn't been a woman? And although sometimes fitting, it can be quite a dangerous game to play since it seems to focus on who we are rather than on what we do.

Naya: Living as an artist is exciting, fulfilling, and often feels like a privilege. However, being a female artist today also comes with a weighty sense of responsibility and urgency. Women's voices have been underrepresented for a very long time—so now that people are finally starting to pay a bit more attention to those voices, I often feel that it's up to us to play catch up and rapidly create and tell stories that include women in every step of the process. Personally I know a number of badass women who are doing just that, and I try to work with them whenever possible!

Would you consider yourselves millennials? If so, what do you find is different for your generation?

Lu: About a year ago, my 90-year-old grandmother was helping me curl my hair, you know just two girls getting ready for a night out on the town. I asked her: "Nonna (that's grandma in Italian in case Joey Tribbiani hadn't taught you that already, but I digress), when you were little, what is it that you wanted to do when you grew up?" "A math teacher," she said. "How come you never became one, what happened there?" "It wasn't really up to me to decide. You know, I was a woman after all." Which left me wondering because, mind you, the grandma in question here is quite the feisty one. "In fact—she continued—if I could go back, I would wish to have been born a man." We kept talking about childhood dreams, then parents, then husbands then finally she asked: "How is it for you, my little one, these days? Do you feel like you and your sister are free to do whatever you want?" I couldn't believe how much pause that question gave me in that moment. It did give me a chance to count my blessing. Yes, Nonna. We are free.



Naya: I am very much “between generations,” which is likely a contributing factor to why much of my work deals with issues that aren’t specific to any one group or age range. It tends to focus more on larger topics lovingly referred to as: “general fears experienced by virtually all humans.” This informs what my advice would be to anyone, of any age—stop focusing on what makes us different, as generations, as genders, as categories of people. In art, entertainment, life, relationships, let’s try to focus more on the things that we all care about, the things we all love, and the things we are all frightened of, as people. Empathy is the artist’s greatest tool.

Three Cheers for Three Lions!

Drama-Queens

Exploring Abdication with Janet and Amanda
Posted on August 14 by Natasha Dawsen, Editor

The tongue-in-cheek anthology, *Abdication!*, a multi-cultural, multi-media dark comedy more than reminiscent of *Black Mirror*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *VR*, will be a featured event for the 10th anniversary THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY DREAM UP FESTIVAL 2019. Performances will be at the Johnson Theater Space at 155 First Avenue (between 9th and 10th Streets), New York City on 09/03: Tuesday, 9pm; 09/04: Wednesday, 6:30pm; 09/05: Thursday, 9pm; 09/06: Friday, 6:30pm; and 09/07: Saturday, 8pm. <https://abdication.brownpapertickets.com/>

The Night Gallery of three tales are
STUCK: a close-knit Italian-American family grapples with the idea that one of its family members plans to remove from society by hooking up full-time to a virtual reality network.
LOVE LOBOTOMY relates the story of two hapless souls deciding to undergo Amigdalar Resurfacing, (a "Love Lobotomy") making them immune to romantic feelings and more productive... maybe.
And finally, **COLOR SCHEME** takes us to a society where everyone has been classified into a specific color-red, green, blue, etc., and the implementation of this system has ostensibly led to perfect harmony. Until someone mixes and matches.

Filled with gallows-humor, song, dance, and multi-media, each episode shows how abdication of a portion of human existence pulls a piece out of the house of cards that we call our lives.

Appearing in this triumvirate of techno-tales is Amanda Cannon, Trenton Clark, Alan Cordoba, Janet Donofrio, Naya James, Stephen Keyes, Cesar Lozada, Mike Ivers, Sid Ross, Meredith Rust, Tony Scheer, and Topher Wallace.

We caught up with two of the denizens of this Twilight Zone for a few words

Janet Donofrio: "I don't think of myself as an artist. I just like to hang out with the cool kids."

Amanda Cannon: "I knew I wanted to be an actor when I performed in a play with my high school speech class. I have primarily focused on theatre as opposed to film because I love the collaboration that goes into creating a play, the connection that is developed with the audience, and the way a show is slightly different every single night.



What's your creative process and how do you make the fantasy elements real?

Donofrio: I look to be true to the character I'm playing, with no judgment. Characters don't know the difference between genres, so every element and circumstance is real for them.

Cannon: To make fantasy elements real, it's important to stay grounded in the truth. Even though we're existing in an alternate universe, or a future version of our own universe, we're still telling the stories of human beings. It's necessary to really get in touch with who these people are and what they want.

How do you inject humor without losing the message?

Donofrio: When a script is well written, the intended humor will shine through with the message intact.

Cannon: I think we use humor in a lot of ways and for many different purposes—sometimes to cover up hurt feelings or sadness, sometimes because we feel uncomfortable or awkward, for example. Understanding why a character is doing or saying something humorous instead of just trying to be funny keeps the message from being lost.

I've always felt that anything fantasy sci-fi or horror are cautionary tales. What's your opinion?

Donofrio: Well, I never go down into the basement when I hear a strange noise!

Cannon: I would agree with that, and *Abdication!* is no exception. I think there's a warning throughout the play about losing your identity and giving up individuality to fit in with society.

They came together with the same answer for "What next?"

"We'll see."

Showtones

COLLABORATING
WITH MEREDITH RUST



The tongue-in-cheek anthology, *Abdication!*, a multi-cultural, multi-media dark comedy more than reminiscent of *Black Mirror*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and VR, will be a featured event for the 10th anniversary THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY DREAM UP FESTIVAL 2019. Performances will be at the Johnson Theater Space at 155 First Avenue (between 9th and 10th Streets), New York City on 09/03: Tuesday, 9pm; 09/04: Wednesday, 6:30pm; 09/05: Thursday, 9pm; 09/06: Friday, 6:30pm; and 09/07: Saturday, 8pm. <https://abdication.brownpapertickets.com/>

Moving up the ranks to “Indie Celebrity Status” is Meredith Rust. Scoring kudos and awards for performances at theaters such as the American Theatre of Actors, Meredith is known for powerful performances, a joyous attitude, and always being a consummate professional. Here’s her reply to “tell us about yourself as an artist.” Case closed.

“Acting, creating a scene, or a play, it’s about creating a character who is a real person, filling in the lines, and sometimes, drawing outside of them too. (It has to be a real person, because we are all real people, therefore incapable of playing anything but, right?) A great writer give you the palette to paint the story and the characters, inside your mind, to then transmit your interpretation to the audience. The director molds the story in service to the writing, and their vision of just how great it can be. The writer, actors, and director, as a team, make it the best they possibly can. And if you always put the best material you can out there, you are living your dream. Creating in general, and specifically acting, is being a conduit for whatever the material and spiritual worlds are presenting to you in the moment, to put the two together into a unique, momentary, fleeting art form, using the body and voice as your tool. I feel as though we create our lives, we attract what we want, even if it is subconscious. We play roles we need to play for our growth, and every part, every story we partake in, teaches us a lesson we

need to learn at that particular time in our lives. Even if no one ever sees it, or just your class of 7 people. It can be a catapult to get you to the next part, or the next project, but maybe more importantly, to grow as a human.”

Always collaborating, Meredith views her creative process the same way:

I start by envisioning the world created by the writer. A whole world can live in your head, and once you get together with your fellow actors and director, you start bringing the imagination to fruition. Others see things you don’t, and vice versa. It’s starts becoming a blend of everyone’s ideas and influences, and grows from there. As long as you believe it, the audience will too. It’s really limitless. You can keep finding new things every time you perform the piece.

Staying the course is also part of her philosophies.

If you play the reality of the situation, the humor can come out, and the play stays on track. You might have to leave a small space for laughter if you get lucky. But stay with your character and their reality. So often the funny things are so ludicrous that the joke is lost on the character, but not the viewer.

Discussing the fantastical element of the show became easy for a Trekkie.

“If you can dream it, you can do it.” I hope to be dead before we all have chips in our heads. I’ve never been much of a horror fan. It shines a light on the darkest places in our psyches, and it’s scary! I don’t really like being scared. I’d rather stay with the good energy. Thrillers are about as far as I like to take my viewing. As a Star Trek fan, science fiction is sometimes scarily prognostic. That show stayed on the cautionary tale bent. Warnings of things veering away from our best interests.

Another member of the burgeoning Wednesday Repertory Company, she invites us to mark our calendars.

Next is our bi-annual showcase for Wednesday Repertory Company (Wedrepco) in October. Always a lot of fun with great original works by our writers and actors. a true group effort that I always look forward to.

Showtones



A featured event for the 10th anniversary THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY DREAM UP FESTIVAL 2019 is Abdication! Filled with gallows-humor, song, dance, and multi-media, the show is a triumvirate of short plays episode shows how abdication of a portion of human existence pulls a piece out of the house of cards that we call our lives: STUCK: what happens when virtual reality becomes a permanent option? LOVE LOBOTOMY: Don't want a relationship – we have surgery for that! COLOR SCHEME I'd love to get to know you but I'm blue and you're green! I see the parables ... how about you?

Performances will be at the Johnson Theater Space at 155 First Avenue (between 9th and 10th Streets), New York City on 09/03: Tuesday, 9pm; 09/04: Wednesday, 6:30pm; 09/05: Thursday, 9pm; 09/06: Friday, 6:30pm; and 09/07: Saturday, 8pm. <https://abdication.brownpapertickets.com/>

Five Star met the producers, director, and writer. The marvelous Meredith Rust was interviewed earlier, here in Showtones, so now let's continue chatting with more members of the cast.

Alan Cordoba-Diaz started auspiciously in high school in Streetcar Named Desire. Not bad! It fueled him so much that, today, he is an accomplished actor ... writer ... director. Stella! Tony Scheer could've been a cardiologist. He's all about the heart: "I just try to be as honest and vulnerable as I can. To me, that's what lets you get to those places where the audience can really connect with you," says Tony. He's also an actor ... writer ... director. A common thread among the company is the Wednesday Repertory Company. Seems they create renaissance people who explode on to the scene.

OK, so, guys, what's your creative process and how do you make the fantasy elements real?

Alan Cordoba-Diaz: Music plays a huge part for me in the creative process for me because a lot of the times, the right song can help you find an element in a character that you didn't know existed. The other thing I do is kinda like the same as beating a lie detector test: believing what you're doing. When I'm on stage, I'm in the story being told, I am that character and the events that are taking place are real. I know it may sound odd but it's what usually works for me and it's not overly complicated either. I love it when things are not overly complicated.

Tony Scheer: I feel that empathy is probably the most important trait a person can have. In life and onstage. I do my best to empathize with every character I play. No matter how unthinkable you might feel a character's motivations or behaviors are, if you use empathy, you can bypass your judgment and realize that people typically do and say what they do because they think they're right. Unless you're playing a sociopath, inflicting pain is a side effect, not the goal. As an actor, you can't accurately portray a character in all their intricacies if you've judged them to be the absolute wrongdoer. When it comes to playing such a character, I find it helpful to give him a legitimate, understandable (though not necessarily justifiable) reason for that. Maybe he's had a rough childhood. Or his heart was broken. It's layers like this that I feel create interesting characters that audiences are drawn to. To answer part two, I feel like fantasy elements are best rendered by treating them like they're not fantastic at all. Because, in the world you're creating onstage, they're not. They're the norm. An elf, if it existed, wouldn't be surprised at its own existence. I'd say, go as crazy with characters and set as you want, then act like it isn't crazy at all.

How do you inject humor without losing the message?

Alan CordoBa-Diaz: I honestly do not try at all to be funny because the audience can tell when you're trying to be funny and 9 times out of 20, it ain't gonna work. A lot of the times, a natural reaction to something can be the funniest thing, especially when you're in the mind of the character you are portraying.

Tony Scheer: For me, as an actor, humor is similar to fantasy, in that it's most effective when feigning ignorance of its intention. The playwright can and will take their liberties, write whatever jokes they want, but the jokes are for the audience, not the actors. As an actor, you don't want to beat an audience over the head with a joke. Also, by downplaying the humor, letting it be natural, you don't remove the audience from the reality of the situation. It's easier for an audience to receive a humorous moment then return to the play if the realism hasn't shifted because of that moment.

I've always felt that anything fantasy sci-fi or horror are cautionary tales. What's your opinion?

Alan CordoBa-Diaz: When it comes to horror tales, 100 percent. Sci-fi? I'm still not sure but when the advancements in scientific research as well as technology, I'm leaning toward "yes" little by little with every year. But in every horror movie, there's a cautionary tale in it in some way, shape or form. Hell, I'm the first person that automatically assumes a hitchhiker is actually a serial killer or something of that nature.

Tony Scheer: I think that fantasy, sci-fi or horror can be cautionary tales, but don't need to be. In my opinion, these genres are, more than anything else, simply the manifestations of active imaginations. The real world we live in can appear mundane and repetitive at times. Dragons, aliens, zombies – they're interesting because they're not what we see every day. They're the products of our minds (as far as we know...), and so there are no limits to them in any regard. They can do, say, or represent whatever their creator wants. So, to me, the presence of these elements doesn't guarantee a cautionary tale, but it sure could be. And probably an exciting one.

What next?

Alan CordoBa-Diaz: After *Abdication*? I guess you'll just have to wait and see but you're gonna definitely like what you see.

Tony Scheer: I'm going to be working on several different projects in the coming months. More so than ever before, I'm going to be focusing not just on stage productions, but also film. I'll be directing a short film soon, as well as working on a web series. Stay tuned! Thanks to everyone for their interest and support!

Showtones

Review “Abdication” at Theater for the New City by Max Berry

Written by Naya James, “Abdication” gives us three short plays set in a world very similar to our own, all connected by a suspiciously charming narrator. Each piece is connected by the central theme of “abdication” or “giving up in a public manner” and each proves to be just as entertaining and chilling as the last.

All of the pieces held their own as thought provoking, funny, and often frightening plays, yet when joined together by a sinister narrator and his expressionless minions, there’s a feeling of unease throughout the piece that is very reminiscent of Black Mirror. All linked together by this idea of “abdication”, the worlds of each play feel similar to our own, enough to where many of the scenarios almost seem plausible, but it’s off kilter just enough to make us uncomfortable, to make us think of what we would do if given these particular set of circumstances or this particular technology. Morality, identity, and memory are all put under the microscope.

The first piece presents itself as a simple family story, but quickly takes a turn for the strange when one of the sons of the family, Tommy, reveals that he plans to attach himself to a machine that will essentially put him in a comatose state but allow him to spend three years in a world inside his mind that he can create. His family, of course, is mortified and what follows is not only a fascinating piece of science fiction, but a beautiful story of what a family will do for those they love and our quest for happiness and fulfillment in this world. This all culminates in an impassioned speech by Tony Scheer as Tommy that leaves a powerful resonance in the space upon its conclusion.

The second piece, centers around yet another fictional technology, this time wiping one of sad memories. A couple that meets just before they are to undergo the operation in order to remove unpleasant relationship memories. flees the operating room, and decides to instead peruse each other, only to discover themselves right back where they started. This play leans more into the comedy than the first one, showing us various points of their relationship that are quite

charming, but get increasingly more worrisome as time goes on. The couple (Played by Naya James and Mike Ivers) had great chemistry and were a joy to watch on stage.

The final piece took place in a world where everyone was assigned a color based on their personality and they were to only ever wear or interact with that color and could only act like that color was supposed to react. The play centered around a woman who was assigned purple, applying to change to an orange and the tension that follows from that request. This was the strangest of the three plays but presented lots of interesting ideas about the roles we assign people in society and did so in a creative and fun way.

All of the pieces held their own as thought provoking, funny, and often frightening plays, yet when joined together by a sinister narrator and his expressionless minions, there’s a feeling of unease throughout the piece that is very reminiscent of Black Mirror. All linked together by this idea of “abdication”, or giving up in a public manor, the worlds of each play feel similar to our own, enough to where many of the scenarios almost seem plausible, but it’s off kilter just enough to make us uncomfortable, to make us think of what we would do if given these particular set of circumstances or this particular technology. Morality, identity, and memory are all put under the microscope.

The use of the narrator was wonderfully unsettling. Speaking directly to the audience and donning a suite and cane, he smiles his way through the whole ordeal. He charms you, invites you in with loud and enthusiastic snake-oil salesman speak and song and dance. You’re enjoying the ride so much that you almost gloss over what he’s actually saying. “Just give up. It’s ok.” Once you do, the contrast becomes chilling. This contrast is further emphasized by his henchmen, two hulking men who show no emotion and hilariously frown their way through each dance sequence. However, when they’re not dancing and simply framing the Narrator and his tricky speech, the sinister undertones of the scenes bleed through.

“Abdication” was different in all the right ways, right down to the use of a retro-looking T.V set to act as an “Alexa”-like voice, show full scenes on the screen, and even show credits as if from a movie to replace the curtain call, further emphasizing the otherworldliness of



JAN EWING reviews ABDICATION! for HI DRAMA

Presented by Theater of the New City as part of the Dream Up Festival 2019

Produced by Three-Headed Lion Productions

Playwright/Producer: Naya James

Director/Producer: Lucia Bellini

Producer: Trenton Clark

Production Stage Manager: Charles Casano

Assistant Stage Manager: Aleela Lew

Lighting Design: Maryam Sweirki

Musical Arranger & Producer: James Higgins

Audio Visual Tech: Paul Purvine

Videographer/Location Sound Mixer: Mark Fraunhofer

Animator: Raylla Chan

Graphics/Programs: Mike Ivers

Publicist: Jay Michaels

THE CAST (in order of appearance)

Narrator/Rick Rarey/Dad (VO)/Mr. Jones (VO): Trenton Clark

Valet/Cleansing Agent: Stephen Keyes

Valet/Cleansing Agent: Topher Wallace

Lorenzo/Blaise: Alan Cordoba-Diaz

Antonio/Dr. Z: Sid Ross

Angela/Viola: Meredith Rust

Giada/Grey Lady: Janet Donofrio

Sofia/Lady In Red: Amanda Cannon

Tommy/Mr. Brown: Tony Scheer

Mara/Mabel: Naya James

Joe: Mike Ivers

Lilo/Don: Cesar Lolada

Shelly (VO)/Little Sally (VO): Erica Penn

BACKGROUND

According to the program, “abdicate” is a verb meaning “to give up or renounce, especially in a voluntary, public, or formal manner.” Mostly, we’ve heard it used when rulers have abrogated their responsibilities; Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and King Edward VIII of England immediately come to mind. But, this word is not limited to royalty. Anyone who wants to live an easier or different life, or just get away from their current situation, for whatever reason, can abdicate. We see it happening everywhere. Couch potatoes who spend life their lives watching television have abdicated. Tech-nerds who stare at screens all day have abdicated. Druggies, divorcees, transgenders, anyone who wants to stop being what they think (or have been told) they are and become someone else have abdicated. It seems to become more ubiquitous every day.

THE PLAY

Described as “A Tragicomedy in 3 Episodes,” Naya James’ “Abdication!” consists of three short plays that examine the nature of changing or opting out. Set in the near future, the episodes are engaging and funny, skillfully written with great imagination and more than a little wit. In Episode I, Lorenzo, a young man who is convinced that his present life is meaningless, strives to convince his middle-class Italian family to support his decision to enter a program that will attach him to a computer, allowing him to live his life as an avatar.

Episode II concerns Mara and Don who meet while being prepped for that same program, and develop a real-life relationship instead (thus “abdicating” their initial decision).

Episode III is the most dystopian. It presents a world where people are classified by color. In this instance, Viola, a Purple, wants to become an Orange. This allows for satire at its best, something we don’t see often enough.

THE PERFORMANCE

Each episode is introduced by a musical number, beautifully conceived and produced by Musical Director James Higgins. As the Narrator, Trenton Clark is a delight. He sings and dances with panache. From his top hat to his patent-leather shoes, he positively exudes charm and elegance. Dancing and singing with Mr. Clark (as his valets) are Stephen Keyes and Topher Wallace, who add a droll counterpoint to his

stylish sophistication. The three were audience favorites, eliciting cheers and applause every time they appeared.

Director Lucia Bellini has developed a fine acting ensemble. Tommy's family, hilariously played in Episode I by Sid Ross, Meredith Rust, Janet Donofrio, Amanda Cannon, and Alan Cordoba-Diaz, could easily be a real Italian family sitting down for Sunday dinner. The arguing and familial conflict were extremely familiar. My partner comes from such a family, and I've spent many wonderful Sundays hearing them spar and disagree over spaghetti and meatballs, never with acrimony, always with love and warm acceptance. There was plenty of that here.

Episode II was the least compelling although it was cleverly presented. Mara, played with distress and sympathy by author Naya James, is bored and unhappy by the repetitious nature of her failed relationships. She thus decides to undergo a surgical procedure that will remove her ability to love. While being interviewed for a television documentary about that, cleverly filmed and presented on a TV screen by Videographer Mark Fraunhofer, she meets Joe, charmingly played by Mike Ivers, who convinces her to have a cup of coffee instead, resulting in their developing a romantic relationship. It does not end particularly well.

Episode III features almost the entire cast coming together to present pure science fiction. Meredith Rust, as Viola, is strong and intense. When she travels to the government agency that controls classification, and pleads that she wants to be an Orange, that she has never felt like a Purple and knows in her heart that a mistake must have been made, she encounters legalistic clap-trap at its most obdurate. She fights valiantly, but in the end, she breaks your heart. Fine acting, beautifully focused.

THE PRODUCTION

Paul Purvine's tech work was clever and well-executed. In Episode I, the family frequently speaks to an "Alexa" type AI device, displayed on their TV screen, that continuously offers funny, off-the-wall information and advice, whether they ask for it or not. In Episode II, half the action, skillfully integrated into the real-time narrative, appears on that same television screen. Episode III features some first rate video animation by Raylla Chan, which dovetails with

the plot and illuminates the conflict. Kudos for these excursions into modern techniques. Science Fiction is the literature of our age. It is a pleasure to see modern technology being put to such good use.

I have three minor caveats. First, the musical sequences were so entertaining, why not close the play with another one? That would have been easy, and it would have provided a more symmetrical structure while allowing for a better resolution. At the moment, the play is anti-climactic. It needs a stronger conclusion. Second, Episode II is ambiguous as to the nature of the surgical procedure Mara chooses to undergo. Initially, I thought she was entering the same computer program Tommy embraced in Episode I, but I was wrong. This needs to be clarified. Third, it seemed at times (not always) that the characters thought they were acting on film. I'm sure they were trying to be intimate, but with no microphones to pick them up, they couldn't be heard. Thus, far too many very funny lines got lost. Film acting and stage acting require entirely different techniques. Speak up, guys. Save all that whispering for Hollywood.

Otherwise, the sets were simple but adequate, the sound and lighting well executed. All in all, "Abdication!" was a great deal of fun; smart, intelligent, and beautifully performed. We all laughed a lot. It deserves a VERY HAPPY FACE.

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

September 3rd & September 5th @ 9pm
September 4th & September 6th @ 6:30pm
September 7th @ 8pm
Theater for the New City
Johnson Theater Space
155 First Avenue
(800) 838-3006
<https://three-headedlion.com/>