



Home

[New Reviews](#) [Previous Reviews](#) [Coming Soon](#) [Archives](#) [Letters](#) [Actors](#)



*Reviewed by Jose
Ruiz*

Safety

Photojournalism sometimes treads a fine line between capturing history and making history. In 1862, famous Civil War photographer Matthew Brady shocked America by displaying his photographs of dead soldiers on the Antietam battlefield. He placed a sign on his New York gallery that read, "The Dead of Antietam." This marked the first time people had witnessed the carnage and bloodshed of war and an article in the *New York Times* reflected that Brady had brought "home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war."

Fast-forward to the present, when the Closet Space Theatre brings up British Playwright Chris Thorpe's look at a recent war in the Balkans, a combat photographer whose work has depicted the most abhorrent scenes of war, and the effects of constant exposure to death and tragedy.

Michael Atkins is a world famous war photographer who has witnessed and captured every possible atrocity of warfare. About to open a retrospective exhibit of his work, he is interviewed by an attractive journalist whose goal is to learn more about the man than the photographer - an objective that eventually leads them to intimacy. Outwardly haughty and self-serving, Michael's internal struggle with a recent event that almost brought tragedy to his daughter makes it evident that his work has made him insensitive to death and suffering. A dinner with a stranger who saved his daughter brings out Michael's cynical view, revealing his focus on capturing the moment at any cost supercedes his regard for lives that he could save while taking his pictures.

A wonderfully tight ensemble of four recreates a bristling story that vibrates with tension, drama and controversy. It's a clear study of a man in conflict, who has broken the golden rule of journalists of not getting involved and just reporting the facts. Michael has often become a part of the story.

John Montana adopts a gritty, hardened look that makes Michael come alive with anger and arrogance, allowing a few subtle moments of tenderness and guilt.

Montana clearly understands his character, allowing himself to be immersed into a man who is clearly flailing for some sense of meaning.

For him the line between art and life has become dotted, with the gaps becoming wider and wider and he obviously weaves back and forth - probably not aware he does it.



John Montana - Mac Brandt

Playing a simple, self-assured man who does not read newspapers, Mac Brandt plays Sean, a man who saved Michael's daughter from drowning, making him somewhat timid, reserved and private; almost a reluctant hero who'd clearly rather be somewhere else.

When Michael insists on showing Sean some of his work, Sean's reaction is the lynchpin on which the premise of the play is built. Sean reveals that when pressed, he can make an aggressive and definite statement about his feelings.

Brandt is absolutely terrific and believable in the role.

Michael's relationship with his wife has declined from an exciting love to a distant and almost obligatory union, one which Susan decides to end. In a strong portrayal, Peggy Goss creates a role of a wife close to liquor dependency and far from marital reconciliation.

She has endured his travels, his brushes with death, his affairs and the close encounter with her daughter's tragedy gives her the resolve to take decisive life altering action. Beautiful and intense, Goss creates a character that finds the inner strength to proceed knowing the certain difficulties and obstacles facing her. When she tells Michael her decision to leave, one can sense a silent cheer from the audience who has been glued to her words.



John Montana - Peggy Goss

Forever in the annals of entertainment, the word "spunk" will be associated with the great Ed Asner line in the Mary Tyler Moore Show of yesteryear, where he tells her she has spunk, and then follows up with "I hate spunk!" Let's see if we can change the flow here by saying that lovely Katrina Lenk plays the role of reporter Tanya with great spunk - in this case spunk being a good thing. Tanya meets Michael, becomes intimate and manages to draw out things he had wanted to hide. Taking matters into her own hands, her assertiveness seems to make Michael uneasy, and when he decides to break it off, she too makes a life changing decision. A lovely fashion plate, Lenk is perfect as the career woman with an appetite for the edgy life and a sense of adventure.



Katrina Lenk - John Montana

Director Peter Forster brings international credits and a stylish artistic eye to the production, as he lights the scenes with shadowy patterns, fills the air with ominous gunfire war sounds and breaks the scenes into flashbacks, monologues and split views keeping a sense of tension throughout the 90 minutes. If there is a flaw, it's that some of the soliloquies are a bit long - some of the dialog between Tanya and Michael is too abrupt. But who cares? Overall this is a powerful presentation that can be taken as a cautionary tale - *beware of excess lust for sensationalism, lest your humanity suffers*. Given the news of the daily carnage in Iraq, we're probably there already.

Safety plays at the McCadden Place Theatre through February 18, 2007. The McCadden Place Theatre is located at: 1157 North McCadden Place, Los Angeles, CA. Reservations at: (818) 780-0661.

Pick of the week

Comments? Write to us at: Letters@ReviewPlays.Com

Photos: Ed Krieger