

Sunny Afternoon Pulled Quotes

LA Weekly - Recommended

"...Much of the humor of Levatino's tersely funny script springs from the well-delineated personalities featured in its large, finely polished ensemble, in particular Darrett Sanders' assured performance as the shrewd but outfoxed homicide captain William Fritz, trying to conduct an honest investigation amidst the machinations."
- Mindy Farabee

Arts in LA - Recommended

"Levatino's deliciously perverse final twist is a knockout sure to flabbergast even the heartiest Kennedy assassination theoreticians."
- Travis Michael Holder

Stage Scene LA - Highly Recommended

"...If ever there were a play tailored to fit gangbusters' goal of "staging the imagined truth with speed and violence," Sunny Afternoon is that play (though any violence taking place is entirely offstage). A prime example of the heights Hollywood Fringe can reach when gifted artists pool their talents, it looks to be one of Fall 2013's most talked-about shows, and one well worth the word-of-mouth it's sure to inspire."
- Steven Stanley

Examiner - Recommended

"...Not since Oliver Stone has a writer/director brought forth such a plausible conspiracy theory as Levatino does in this show. It is a compelling look at Lee Harvey Oswald and the events that surrounded the assassination of JFK."
- Bob Leggett

ArtsInLA - Recommended

"...Under Levatino's direction, the ensemble cast is uniformly excellent. Sanders is particularly arresting (no pun intended), mining a down-home cowboy "aw-shucks" charm as a guy obviously more upset about a cancelled football game and intent on making sure his Chinese food delivery includes wings than he is interested in questioning the man seated across from him accused of one of the most infamous crimes in history. Sanders nails Fritz with veteran ease, understanding Levatino's intent to make Fritz likable until the coldblooded and unfeeling nature of his quest overshadows his easygoing allure."
- Travis Michael Holder

LifelInLA - Recommended

"...I'm not sure which impressed me more: the lighting, the pacing, the performances, the writing, or the directing. It was an outstanding way to kick off a Saturday night."

- Brett Edwards

Showmag - Recommended

"Sunny Afternoon is a dialogue-rich script made maximally dramatic through the inherently tragic circumstances on display."

Ben Miles

Pat Rye Reviews - Recommended

"...This is one of the best ensemble casts I've seen in long time."

- Patricia Foster Rye

Loz Feliz Ledger - Recommended

"...Fine characterizations are offered by Darrett Sanders as police Cpt. Fritz, Gil Glasgow as the police chief and Michael Franco as District Attorney Henry Wade. "Sunny Afternoon" will reverberate with those who lived during this tumultuous time and for a younger generation will bring to life an epic event in the history of our country."

- Marilyn Tower Oliver

SUNNY AFTERNOON - THE FULL REVIEWS

GO: SUNNY AFTERNOON One needn't be a fan of conspiracy theories or the NFL to appreciate Sunny Afternoon, but a more-than-passing familiarity with both could offer grounding for the macho power games of playwright Christian Levatino's taut and inspired take on the JFK assassination. Sunny Afternoon wonders what exactly went down over the course of the two days that Lee Harvey Oswald spent in custody of the Dallas police, before his appointment with the business end of Jack Ruby's revolver. Was Oswald just a pawn in a shadowy larger game? How do the priorities of ordinary people become political footballs? Why is Coca-Cola so dang refreshing? Much of the humor of Levatino's tersely funny script springs from the well-delineated personalities featured in its large, finely polished ensemble, in particular Darrett Sanders' assured performance as the shrewd but outfoxed homicide captain William Fritz, trying to conduct an honest investigation amidst the machinations. Theatre Asylum, 6320 Santa Monica Blvd., Hlywd.; Fri., Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m.; through Dec. 1. (323) 962-1632, theatreasylum-la.com. (Mindy Farabee)

Travis Michael Holder - Arts in L.A.

Just as we are about to observe the 50th anniversary of the JFK assassination and considering the much-discussed newly published book *The Kennedy Half-Century*, which claims to blow all conspiracy theories out of the water, playwright Christian Levatino's Gangbusters Theatre Company debuts the world premiere of his *Sunny Afternoon*, an engrossing work of historical fiction—or is it fictionalized history?—that proposes a whole new supposition about the still-controversial death of our 35th president.

Taking place in a cluttered, sparsely grim police interrogation room directly after the arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald (Andy Hirsch) in a Dallas movie theater, *Sunny Afternoon* speculates about the unrecorded 48 hours that he remained in the custody of real-life Police Captain William Fritz (Darrett Sanders) as he tried to use his Ben Johnson—esque good-ol'-boy persona to pry concrete answers out of Oswald before he was to be transferred into federal custody.

Under Levatino's direction, the ensemble cast is uniformly excellent. Sanders is particularly arresting (no pun intended), mining a down-home cowboy "aw-shucks" charm as a guy obviously more upset about a cancelled football game and intent on making sure his Chinese food delivery includes wings than he is interested in questioning the man seated across from him accused of one of the most infamous crimes in history. Sanders nails Fritz with veteran ease, understanding Levatino's intent to make Fritz likable until the coldblooded and unfeeling nature of his quest overshadows his easygoing allure. There are wonderful, juicily scripted moments provided for most of the cast members, especially the heart-clutching histrionics of Gil Glasgow as Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry, Justin Welborn as the swaggering but diminutive Assistant DA Bill Alexander, Janellen Steininger as Postal Inspector H.D. Holmes, and Mark St. Amant as possibly sinister 11th-hour surprise visitor Howard

Hunt—yes, that Howard Hunt, one of Richard Nixon’s White House plumbers who claimed on his deathbed he had been approached by the CIA to help engineer the assassination of Kennedy.

Levatino’s knack for creating rich characters and clever dialogue—not to mention casting exceptional actors to interpret his vision—makes it possible to suspend belief in knowing historically how this sunny afternoon a half-century ago turned out. Even as the play rushes through 90 minutes of tense confrontations and chest-butting among between a roomful of testosterone-laden Texans calling dibs before what we all know will be the inevitable conclusion, Levatino’s deliciously perverse final twist is a knockout sure to flabbergast even the heartiest Kennedy assassination theoreticians.

October 24, 2013

ReviewPlays.com

SUNNY AFTERNOON

Theatre Asylum

Reviewed by Carol Kaufman Segal

The Gangbusters Theatre Company, in association with Combined Artform, is presenting the world premiere of Sunny Afternoon, a play about Lee Harvey Oswald and the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Written and directed by Christian Levatino, it is a powerful piece with an equally powerful cast that will leave you to wonder whether Oswald really was the lone culprit in this dastardly historic event.



The play is based on 48 hours that Oswald (Andy Hirsch) was held in the custody of the Dallas police. Set in the Homicide and Robbery Office of Police Captain William Fritz (Darrett Sanders), The Dallas Police Department had only 48 hours in which to get a confession from Oswald admitting that he had killed President John F. Kennedy, as he rode in a motorcade with his wife Jackie in Dealy Plaza, Dallas Texas.

Oswald was originally arrested for the murder of Police Officer J.D Tippit who was killed on a Dallas street 45 minutes after the President was shot. But certain evidence, concluded by the Dallas Police, incriminated Oswald in the assassination of Kennedy and they were hell-bent on getting a confession from him before he was scheduled to be transferred to the county jail.

During their interrogation, they spoke about many things including football (having to cancel football in Dallas was almost considered a crime itself!), Coca-Cola, Pepsi Cola, movies, his three years living in Russia, about what guns he possessed (he denied owning any), and about his activities during the shooting. But at no time, would Oswald confess or own up to anything regarding the shooting of President Kennedy.

In Levantino's play, before Oswald is to be transferred, he is left alone with his "attorney" in Captain Fritz's office where it is discovered that he did not act alone in his crime. As he was being transferred from the Dallas police headquarters to the county jail, Oswald was shot and killed. Many Americans still believe that he did not act alone, and there have been many conspiracy theories over the 50 years since the assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963.

Sunny Afternoon will keep you spellbound in your seat as you watch a cast of performers who make their characters come to life keeping you tense throughout the entire interrogation. They include LQ Victor, Dustin Sisney, Patrick Flanagan, Carlo LaTempa (understudy for Jim Boelsen), Donnie Smith, Gil Glasgow, Patrick Hume (understudy for Justin Welborn), Michael Franco, Giovanni Adams, Janellen Steininger, and Mark St. Amant.

Theatre Asylum is located at 6320 Santa Monica Blvd. in Hollywood where you can see Sunny Afternoon playing Fridays and Saturdays at 8 PM, Sundays at 3 PM through December 1, 2013. Reservations can be made by calling (800) 838-3006, or online ticketing is available at www.gangbusterstheatre.com.

Running time is 86 minutes, **Highly recommended.**

[Theater Review] JFK Conspiracy Play "Sunny Afternoon" On Stage

By Marilyn Tower Oliver, Ledger Theater Critic

Nov. 22nd marks the 50th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Although Lee Harvey Oswald, who was killed two days later while in police custody, was declared the lone assassin, conspiracy theories still abound.

"Sunny Afternoon," written and directed by Christian Levantino and produced by Corryn Cummings, explores the 48 hours that Oswald was kept in the custody of Police Cpt. William Fritz.

As playgoers find their way into the small theater space, they see a young man handcuffed to a chair in a sparse office—the only decoration is the Texas lone star flag and a photograph of President Kennedy. As the action begins we discover this is Oswald, portrayed by Andy Hirsh, and that he has just been arrested for killing the president.

Almost immediately we become aware of tensions between the Dallas police and FBI agents who want the case to be moved to Washington, D.C.

References to the film *The Manchurian Candidate* hint that Oswald may have been brainwashed and is acting under the control of others. Even though the audience knows Oswald's fate, we were on edge as a shocking conspiracy theory unfolds.

The large cast is predominately male with Janellen Steininger portraying the only female character, Postal Inspector H.D. Holmes. The acting is uniformly strong. Hirsh's interpretation of Oswald's shows a man who is either naïve or perhaps duplicitous in his protestations of his innocence.

In contrast, police and federal agents exude a testosterone, "good old boy," filled world. Fine characterizations are offered by Darrett Sanders as police Cpt. Fritz, Gil Glasgow as the police chief and Michael Franco as District Attorney Henry Wade.

"Sunny Afternoon" will reverberate with those who lived during this tumultuous time and for a younger generation will bring to life an epic event in the history of our country.

The 89-minute play contains strong language, runs without intermission and may not be suitable for children.

Sunny Afternoon, through Dec. 1st, Theatre Asylum, 6320 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood.
Tickets: (800) 838-3006.

Carol Kaufman Segal - Stage Happenings

The Gangbusters Theatre Company, in association with Combined Artform, is presenting the world premiere of *Sunny Afternoon*, a play about Lee Harvey Oswald and the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Written and directed by Christian Levantino, it is a powerful piece with an equally powerful cast that will leave you to wonder whether Oswald really was the lone culprit in this dastardly historic event.

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Sunny Afternoon

Brett Edwards - Life In L.A.

The Gangbusters Theatre Company stage production *Sunny Afternoon* begins with what we know: That John F. Kennedy was assassinated November 22, 1963 in Dealey Plaza, Dallas, Texas at 12:30 p.m. central time. The Warren Commission, established by Lyndon Johnson, turned in an 888 page final report concluding that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone gunman in the successful assassination of the President of the United States. Various witnesses at the scene reported hearing three shots sound off extremely close together. Two of those shots were confirmed hits on Kennedy, one being the fatal headshot. Three shots from a bolt action Italian Carcano rifle fired within a time frame of six to eight seconds. How do we know this? Abraham Zapruder. Zapruder had a clear vantage point while filming the

presidential motorcade with his Model 414 PD Bell & Howell eight-millimeter camera silent motion camera. During this footage, Kennedy is visibly shot twice.

Welcome to the World Premiere of *Sunny Afternoon* a stage play written and directed by Christian Levatino. *Sunny* provides an impeccable ensemble cast with wonderfully conflicting characters. This fast paced play takes place during the 48 hours Oswald was held for questioning. The investigation unit is lead by Captain Fritz, played by Darrett Sanders. Standing at an intimidating 6' 2", Sanders is cast perfectly as the lead detective. Combining the good 'ole boy twang with his quick-witted jokes, Sanders sets the pace as the cast darts through the series of events.

LIGHTS UP.

Oswald, played by Andy Hirsch, sits alone in a Texas homicide office handcuffed to a chair. Like a magician, Captain Fritz juggles his necessary need to garner a confession, versus the lack of experience and composure from over-irritated FBI Special Agent James Hosty (Patrick Flanagan). The entire cast was on point and their flawless timing only made me think of the countless hours of rehearsal they must have put in. It certainly worked as the attention deficit disorder of the lawmen took comedic turns that coerced the entire theatre into laughter.

Throughout the play Fritz tries endlessly to get Oswald to admit his role in the assassination, as well as his ownership of a specific rifle. Even when confronted with a picture of himself holding a rifle, Oswald continues to deny, claiming the photograph was faked. Adding pressure on Fritz is Police Chief Jesse Curry (Glasgow). Curry pushes himself to the brink of a heart attack almost every time he enters the room. Fritz's due diligence and experience suspends our disbelief that he means business. And nothing brings dramatic irony like a gun toting District Attorney (Franco) who's pissed off because not only is football cancelled, but he should be deer hunting instead of dealing with a Marxist turned alleged assassinator.

Thickening the plot is the re-occurrence of Coca-Cola in the play. The magnificent lighting and sound effects throughout, are only heightened each time a glass bottle is cranked opened, leading us to believe Oswald's mind is being controlled through Coke. Manchurian Candidate ring a bell for anyone?

I'm not sure which impressed me more: the lighting, the pacing, the performances, the writing, or the directing. It was an outstanding way to kick off a Saturday night.

Throughout college I did the same presentation for multiple classes about the Kennedy Assassination and I only wished I had seen this play before developing said presentation. Not only was I entertained for the hour and a half, but it was a history lesson every American should hear. The fictional elements of the conspiracy were almost cinematic with their use of lighting and sound.

As the play comes down to its final conclusion it dramatically changes pace when E. Howard Hunt (St. Amant) enters the office, seemingly unnoticed. Snide and neatly subtle, Hunt heightens the conspiracy with his memorable performance during the last ten minutes of the play. If you are unfamiliar with E. Howard Hunt, Hunt engineered the first Watergate burglary, and he also reportedly exclaimed on his death bed that he was approached by the Central Intelligence Agency to be part of a JFK assassination team. Real world conspiracy? Maybe... However, the creative verisimilitude of this play is certain. Running a relentless 89 minutes, without an intermission, you're sure to be on the edge of your seat for the duration.

Sunny Afternoon stars the magnificent ensemble cast including: Darrett Sanders (Captain

Fritz), Andy Hirsch (Oswald), LQ Victor (Detective Elmer Boyd), Dustin Sisney (Det. Simms), Patrick Flanagan (FBI Agent James Hosty), Jim Boelsen (FBI Agent James Bookout), Donnie Smith, Gil Glasgow (Police Chief Jesse Curry), Justin Welborn (Asst. D.A. Bill Alexander), Michael Franco (D.A. Henry Wade), Giovanni Adams (Clarence Shoemake), Janellen Steininger (Postal Inspector H.D. Holmes), and Mark St. Amant (Howard Hunt). *Sunny Afternoon* is presented by Gangbusters Theatre Company, in association with Combined Artform, at Theatre Asylum (6320 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood, CA 90038). Performances are held through December 1 on Fridays and Saturdays at 8pm, and Sundays at 3pm. Admission is \$20 dollars with special discounts for seniors and students. For more information go to <http://www.theatreasylum-la.com/>.

Sunny Afternoon (Asylum Theatre)

Dale Edwards Review

The continued controversy over Who Shot JFK, a half-century on, has not yet been settled. And it's in fiction that we are allowed some insight into what SMERSH-like conspiracy might have contributed to his assassination 50 years ago last November 22nd.

So, playwright/director Christian Levatino has added his own suspicions to the mix: Castro? CIA? Lone deranged fellow? *Manchurian Candidate* material? Who the hell knows for certain? But the search for fuller answers is apparently an on-going game.

In this scenario, set in the Dallas police-department that has jurisdiction over the Dealy Plaza, where the motorcade was ambushed, we discover a young man, handcuffed, seated in a chair with his back to us. Policemen and their bosses, profane, angry and often unintelligent, come in and out to figure out who this guy is who exudes charm and cooperation, pleasant to all, denying he killed neither the President or police-officer J.D. Tippitt in the movie theatre he'd run to hide in. Or, as he says, just wile away a boring afternoon, since his wife had left him.

In a series of scenes, over 90-minutes of intermissionless time, we meet the varying cadre of FBI, Secret Service, CIA and Dallas Cops, each with jurisdictional disputes (does the FBI, representing the Federal government, take precedence over the killing of a Federal officer (JFK), or does the CIA (who perhaps instigated the killing and needs to cover up its fingerprints), or does it remain in the hands of the local police force? As it turns out, at that time there was no law saying that outside of a Federally-owned facility, the U.S. gov't had no jurisdiction, not that it stops them from rudely insisting they do.

Writer Levatino carefully sets us up for the surprise (and, unfortunately, satisfying) ending, with character-delineation carefully presented. But director Levatino undercuts some of his build by shoveling on the testosterone, with much shouting and profanity. The one carefully-sane character in this is Police Captain William Fritz (an intelligent Darrett Sanders),

who has to play negotiator with not only the prime suspect, Lee Harvey Oswald (a beautifully contained Andy Hirsch), but with the other raging bulls and knuckleheads you'll find in any law-enforcement compound. LQ Victor is a nerdy cop who just *loves* his Coca-Cola. His partner, Dick Simms (quiet Dustin Sisney) is caught between humanitarian concerns and his job. The one Secret Service agent, Forrest Sorrels (Donnie Smith), is properly terrified of what has just happened to a President only five feet away from him. The two FBI agents are totally in contrast: blustery James Hosty (Patrick Flanagan) – a runty cock-o'-the-walk, and utterly silent (and all the stronger for it), James Bookout (Jim Boelsen), both shine, as does a panicky Chief of Police, Jesse Curry (Gil Glasgow), and good-ol'-boy and nasty piece-o'-work, Assistant D.A. Bill Alexander (Patrick Hume), and equally blustery (these are Texans, after all) District Attorney Henry Wade (Michael Franco). Others do fine work, including the stranger who comes in at the end to lend sinister viability to Levatino's well-plotted script (Mark St. Amant).

The play, a hit with the L.A. Theatre Festival last year, could use another directorial eye to tone down the constant noise and give the actors some breathing room to explore nuances that are missing here, probably demanded of them in order to keep the pace at fever-pitch. But his ensemble is strong enough to allow for subtler approaches to their characters' needs and he needs to trust it.

All the technical aspects are top-drawer for this 99-seat production: David Mauer's grubby police office; the lighting design of Matt Rickter as well as John Zalewski's sound design; Kaitlyn Aylward's excellent period costuming; and authentic-period photographic projections by Mike Gratzmiller.

Now, it turns out Coca Cola plays a dominant role in this play (won't divulge why) and you have to wonder if the major corporation donated all the period bottles of the beverage (as they should), or have they stiffed the producers the way the local distributors wouldn't contribute to last year's *El Grande de Coca Cola* (in Santa Monica)? A political point is being made here, so perhaps they thought it less-than-advantageous to cooperate. Curious question, eh? With some tweaking, Levatino's play could have a much longer shelf-life in other productions. Glad I saw it and I recommend it highly.

Sunny Afternoon plays through February 1st, 2014, at Theatre Asylum, 6320 Santa Monica Blvd (just west of Vine Street), Hollywood, CA 90038. Tickets: 800.838.3006 or at www.gangbusterstheatre.com.

SUNNY AFTERNOON



On November 22, 1963, at about half-past-noon Dallas time, President John F. Kennedy was shot as his motorcade passed in front of the Texas School Book Depository ... and thirty

minutes later was pronounced dead. On November 24, the President's alleged assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, was himself fatally shot by local nightclub operator Jack Ruby as a nation sitting glued to their TV screens looked on in horror.

But what about the forty-eight hours separating these two America-shattering events?

Playwright-director Christian Levatino and his gangbusters theatre company* let us be flies on the walls of the Dallas Police Headquarters where Oswald spent his last two days under police interrogation in Levatino's gripping new play *Sunny Afternoon*, now getting its official World Premiere following its Best-Of-Fringe-winning workshop at last June's Hollywood Fringe Festival. Primarily fact-based, *Sunny Afternoon* would be an edge-of-your-seater even without the bit of conspiracy-theory hypothesizing Levatino throws in for spice, making us eyewitnesses to history being made and giving us a closer glimpse into a man most of us know only through frustratingly brief newsreel footage.

We witness one Oswald denial after another, delivered with such Southern politeness that we could easily find ourselves believing this seemingly sincere young man.

Did you kill the President? No, sir, I didn't. Do you own a rifle? No, sir, I don't. Is this a photo of you holding a rifle? No, sir, it's a fake. Who is A.J. Hiddle, whose forged draft card you had in your possession when we arrested you? You know as much about it as I do.

Chief among those involved in questioning Oswald (Andy Hirsch) are police captain William Fritz (Darrett Sanders), FBI agent James Hosty (Patrick Flanagan), district attorney Henry Wade (Michael Franco) and assistant DA Bill Alexander (Justin Welborn), and Postal Inspector H.D. Holmes (Janellen Steininger). Also present are detectives Elmer Boyd and Dick Simms (LQ Victor and Dustin Sisney) and FBI agent James Bookout (Jim Boelsen). A pissed-as-hell Police Chief Jesse Curry (Gil Glasgow) bursts in briefly, as does African-American janitor Clarence Shoemake (Marvin Gay).

Completing the cast is Mark St. Amant as (E.) Howard Hunt, and if you're wondering what one of Nixon's White House "plumbers" is doing in *Sunny Afternoon*, recall that Hunt's deathbed confession (as reported in *Rolling Stone*) has the co-engineer of the first Watergate burglary claiming to have been approached by the CIA to be part of a JFK assassination team.

Reality occasionally gives way to fantasy in sequences that take us inside Oswald's mind, most intriguingly when hypothetical parallels are drawn between Oswald and the character Lawrence Harvey played in John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate*.

Regardless of whether you buy into *Sunny Afternoon*'s *Manchurian Candidate* theorizing (and I for one actually preferred the fact-based scenes), *Sunny Afternoon* proves the theatrical equivalent of a page-turner from the first moments of Oswald's police questioning to the muffled gunshots heard soon after his being escorted out of the interrogation room on his way to the county jail he never reached.

Sunny Afternoon is jam-packed with topnotch performances, the absolute best of which is Sanders, who so disappears into the speak-softly-but-carry-a-big-stick "good ol' boy" Police Captain Fritz that you might want to pinch yourself to believe what you're seeing is a brilliant actor at work and not the real thing.

Director-writer Levatino lucked out too in casting as Lee Harvey Oswald Best Featured Actor Scenie winner Hirsch, whose boy-next-door-with-an-edge quality makes the man whose

alleged acts sent a nation into mourning an all-too-human powder keg capable of exploding when least expected. (It's uncanny how closely Hirsch is able to replicate Oswald's speech patterns as recorded on only several minutes of black-and-white film.)

Powerful work is done too by Smith as the secret service agent riding in the car behind the President's, Welborn as the pistol-packing assistant DA who'd much rather be deer hunting this weekend, Flanagan as an FBI agent who could use a bit of Captain Fritz's finesse when interrogating Oswald, Glasgow as a police chief so overwrought he seems about this close to a heart attack, and Franco as a prosecutor whose badge of pride is 23 death penalty verdicts out of 24 cases.

Gay and Steininger make particularly vivid impressions in their cameos, he as a soft-spoken African-American entirely of Sunny Afternoon's place and time and she as the play's sole female character, the feisty postal inspector who'd already had her eyes on Oswald for some time before his arrest.

Boelsen, Sisney, and Victor are quite good as FBI agent Bookout and detectives Simms and Boyd, though the latter's suspenders and high-water pants may be bringing out a bit too much Steve Urkel in Elmer Boyd.

Finally, the always excellent St. Amant gives Hunt a just-right slippery-smooth quality that fits the play's mystery man to a T.

From its bare, black-box Fringe origins, Sunny Afternoon has morphed into as finely designed a production as any writer-director could wish for beginning with David Mauer's meticulously detailed police interrogation room complete with vintage phone, posters, Kennedy portrait, and assorted 1960s-appropriate paraphernalia. Matt Richter's varied, arresting lighting (including several sequences illuminated by handheld flashlights and one by strobe) and John Zalewski's suspense-heightening sound design (including some terrific music choices) are as good as it gets, with Kaitlyn Alward giving each actor a character-appropriate, historically accurate costume to wear (with the possible exception of Elmer's "flood pants" ensemble). Mike Gratzmiller's highly effective projections include the famed Zapruder silent 8mm motorcade footage made all the more electrifying by the addition of a single burst of sound. Sunny Afternoon is produced by Corryn Cummins, Leon Shanglebee, and Matthew Quinn. Donald A. Smith is assistant producer. Zack Guiler is scenic builder and Marine Walton scenic painter. Alyssa Champo is stage manager and Daniel Coronel assistant director/assistant stage manager.

If ever there were a play tailored to fit gangbusters' goal of "staging the imagined truth with speed and violence," Sunny Afternoon is that play (though any violence taking place is entirely offstage). A prime example of the heights Hollywood Fringe can reach when gifted artists pool their talents, it looks to be one of Fall 2013's most talked-about shows, and one well worth the word-of-mouth it's sure to inspire.

*in association with Combined Artform

Theater Asylum, 6320 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood. Through December 1. Fridays and Saturdays at 8:00. Sundays at 3:00. Reservations: 800 838-3006.

www.gangbusterstheatre.com

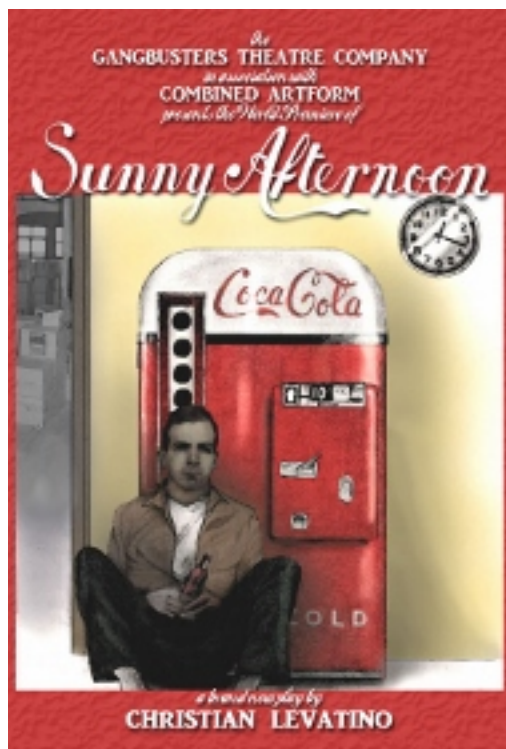
—Steven Stanley

October 19, 2013

Los Angeles Theater Review: **SUNNY AFTERNOON** (Theatre Asylum)

by [Tony Frankel](#) on December 30, 2013

in [Theater-Los Angeles](#)



CONSPIRACY THEORISTS AND THEATER LOVERS, UNITE!

Remember E. Howard Hunt? This intelligence officer was one of Nixon's White House Plumbers, that clandestine band of operatives who were assigned to fix any of those nasty little security "leaks" emanating from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Hunt, along with G. Gordon

Liddy, plotted a burglary at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in D.C. and ended up serving 33 months in prison for his role in the Watergate Scandal.



Hunt was also a writer. Among his many works, mostly novels, is a play entitled “A Calculated Risk.” But there is something about Hunt which has not been substantiated. Not long before his death, Hunt disclosed that he and several others (including LBJ) were part of the conspiracy to kill President John F. Kennedy, adding that the code name for the operation, “The Big Event,” was authored by Hunt himself. Honestly, whenever I hear plausible conspiracy theories about JFK’s assassination, my blood begins to boil. Not because I don’t believe they are grounded in truth, but because I firmly believe that this country took a fall on November 22, 1963 from which it has yet to recover. I also believe in the search for truth; most likely, we will never know exactly what happened, but the detective work, subsequent theories and movies such as Oliver Stone’s *JFK* are healthy ways to deal with the sadness behind the anger behind the inconsolable grief.



Fresh on the heels of the 50th anniversary of JFK's death, another big event has landed on a small Los Angeles stage, where Gangbusters Theatre Company, "dedicated to staging the imagined truth with speed & violence," is presenting *Sunny Afternoon*. The abstract narrative centers on suspected assassin Lee Harvey Oswald as he is grilled by a swarming team of local and federal investigators in the office of Dallas Police Captain William Fritz. Oswald is shuffled in and out of this cramped space belonging to the homicide and robbery division, so Fritz has precious little time to coerce a confession from Oswald.



It is believed that no tape recordings were made of Oswald's remarks, and many notes taken of his statements were destroyed. Since there is no recording of the interrogations that occurred in the 48 hours before Oswald was to be reassigned to county jail, writer/director Christian Levatino has clearly culled through mounds of material to create a docudrama so thrillingly executed by a hotshot 13-member ensemble, that suspension of disbelief is unnecessary. Most astounding is the air of tension concerning Oswald's fate, given that we know full well that these hours are leading up to his murder at the hands of nightclub owner and two-bit gangster, Jack Ruby.



I'm not going to give away details on what happens as that's part of the fun. I assume one of Levatino's sources was Mae Brussell's compilation for *The People's Almanac* of every known statement or remark made by Oswald between his arrest and death. For example, it is purported that Oswald, upon recognizing FBI agent James Hosty, says, "You have been at my home two or three times talking to my wife. I don't appreciate your coming out there when I was not there." Interspersed among such lines are mild-mannered conversations about Coca-Cola, B-movies and football. As a result, Levatino's dialogue crackles with authenticity in an Aaron Sorkin-esque manner, and his cast list includes FBI and Secret Service agents, detectives, a postal inspector, a janitor and District Attorneys (missing, of course, is the public defender that Oswald consistently requests, namely John J. Abt from New York). And then there's that detective sitting at an upstage table reading a paperback version of Hunt's play, "A Calculated Risk."

This 90-minute one-act is obviously a condensed version of the questionings and examinations, so a *Twilight Zone*-like contrivance of light and sound help to speed through time (this same device is also Levatino's way to cleverly tease us that not all is what it seems regarding Oswald's involvement). The effects are handled quite



well, especially considering the low-budget trappings: John Zalewski's directional sound design (offstage commotion, a transistor radio) is exceptional, and Matt Richter once again proves why he is the one to hire for an inventive lighting design utilizing limited instruments. David Mauer's dioramic box set is chockablock with time-specific furnishings, paneling and artifacts, which are matched by Kaitlyn Aylward's authentic costumes.

Levatino's direction of his own play is surprisingly urgent; while some of his actors could create more nuance and depth, the ensemble really rocks. As Fritz, Darrett Sanders offers damn near the best performance of the year; every line drips with a rich background that the script does not afford. No pun intended, but Andy Hirsch blew me away as Oswald; he plays it cool, but his internal machinery is running on a full tank; at any given moment, I felt like rushing the stage either to hug him, shake him, or smack him.



Yes, this is an exciting endeavor, but something is missing. While the characters are numbly or nonchalantly going about their business regarding events surrounding Dealy Plaza, Levantino skirts around the emotional impact of the assassination. A few characters are rightfully upset that their menial existence has been irritatingly interrupted, but we are kept at an arms-distance from a much-needed poignancy. Even though the play speeds along at a breathless pace, I missed that one “aha” moment—barely hinted at here—when one of them suddenly becomes palpably aware in the midst of his crime-fighting duties that his President is actually dead.



Thus, the general emotion on display is testosterone-fueled hotheadedness (and a few actors mistake shouting for feeling). Fortunately, there’s a refreshing amount of dialect-rich humor: Assistant DA Bill Alexander

states, “Mr. Oswald, I’m a forgiving guy, but not only did you quite possibly ruin the remainder of the Twentieth Century you put a Goddamn shit stump in mahhweekend.”

With the exception of the aforementioned line, none of the other characters showed a keen awareness that the course of history has been changed. The conspiracy theory offered is most satisfying, but for *Sunny Afternoon* to move from thrill ride to devastating experience (and perhaps move from a storefront theater to a professional production), Levatino needs to evolve his script and make us palpably aware—as Kushner did with *Angels in America*—that the personal and political bonds between individuals have been irrevocably destroyed.

However philosophers define “truth,” Hunt once said that “no one is entitled to the truth.” That may be true in its own convoluted way, but I sure am glad that Levatino and Gangbusters are hunting for it.





photos by James Storm and Nathan Haugard

Sunny Afternoon

Gangbusters Theatre Company

in association with Combined Artform

Theatre Asylum, 6320 Santa Monica Blvd. in Hollywood

scheduled to end on February 1, 2014

for tickets, call (800) 838-3006 or visit <http://www.gangbusterstheatre.com/>

- See more at:

<http://www.stageandcinema.com/2013/12/30/sunny-afternoon/#sthash.bJvwlrYa.dpuf>