

■ Theatre review

Miller's 'Bridge' nearly collapses under misguided production



KATE HORTON | PHOTOGRAPHER

Jay Hash dominates the stage in the University Theatre's production of "A View From the Bridge."

The University's presentation of Miller's play falters in the first act but builds strength in the second act

BY RYAN NYBURG
PULSE EDITOR

The late playwright Arthur Miller has gone in and out of style for decades, though the majority of his work has withstood the test of time and the various artistic interpretations to which his plays have been subjected. The University Theatre's production of Miller's "A View From the Bridge" manages to show the master's versatility while giving a voice to some great student talent. But this does not excuse the production for a few near fatal missteps.

The play concerns Brooklyn longshoreman Eddie Carbone, who allows two of his wife's cousins to stay in his house after the cousins sneak into the country from Italy. Eddie's kindness begins to run short when one of the cousins takes to his niece, whom he and his wife have been caring for since childhood. Unable to rationally explain why he feels so strongly about the girl's budding independence, he lashes out at her love interest and eventually brings the entire neighborhood down upon himself.

The production is wrapped in the stark minimalism college theater seems to do so well, but it is also not without its artistic touches. The backdrops, particularly one of the Brooklyn Bridge, have a van Gogh motif running through them that seems to be striving to add a dream-like quality to the

setting. The lighting is subtle and creative, shading the emotional content of the performances, letting the audience into a character's mood before the mood is even expressed.

The lead roles are especially above par, with Jay Hash dominating the stage as Eddie. His performance is the driving force behind the production. Danielle Kardum, as his wife, Beatrice, counters with an equally heartfelt role limited only by the fact that it's a supporting performance. The two have an excellent interplay, bickering with great panache.

The other supporting roles range from decent to adequate, with everyone picking up in the emotionally charged second act. There is a problem, however, that cannot be attached to any given performance. The cast often fails to give the proper emotional weight behind the material, leading the audience to occasionally laugh during a dramatic moment or to completely miss a change in a character's mood.

The play draws from Miller's Greek tragedy influences, detailing a man who cannot or would not control his passions. This play is a tragedy imported into a terse family situation, but until the second act much of the cast seems to be disconnected from this fact.

Though it works better as a whole, the second act also has its own problems. One of the artistic liberties

taken with the work is the addition of dancers in the background playing the roles of passersby. The decision adds useless, barely noticed white noise to the background through much of the first act. In the second, it boils over into a major blunder.

In one of the play's most emotional scenes, Eddie calls the immigration authorities to have the two immigrants picked up, knowing full well how dishonorable his friends and family will view the act. Instead of allowing the actor to do his work and perform the scene, bombastic music blasts through the speakers, and dancers seem to take over the stage. The audience is told how to feel instead of being allowed to experience it for themselves. Eddie's actions are not allowed to sink in with any level of subtlety and the play is provided with a false climax that draws away from the power of the closing scene.

But though these blunders limit the play's force, they do not completely dull it. "A View From the Bridge" is one of Miller's most emotionally powerful works, where he drops the socio-political concerns of his classics "Death of a Salesman" and "The Crucible" and focuses everything on the human element. For Hash's performance if nothing else, the play is worth checking out. It will be running at the Robinson Theatre on March 4, 5, 11 and 12 at 8 p.m., March 3 at 7:30 p.m. and March 6 at 2 p.m.

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■ Movie review

'Be Cool' falls flat with its wandering plot, distant characters

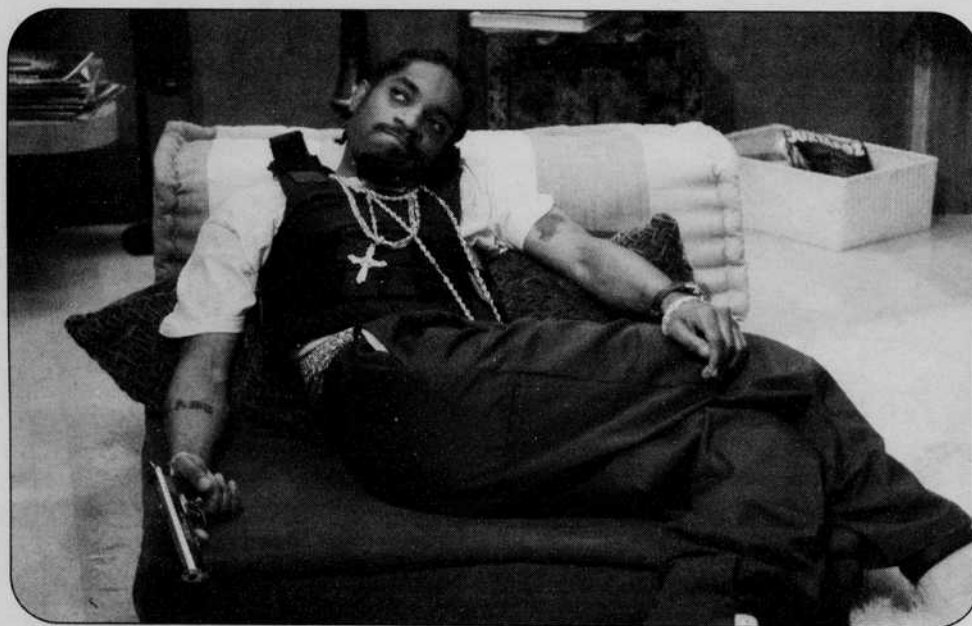
Despite an eclectic cast, this sequel remains unengaging, unlike its 1995 predecessor, "Get Shorty"

BY CHRISTY LEMIRE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Precious little is cool about "Be Cool," the sequel to the 1995 comedy "Get Shorty." But then again, "Be Tepid" wouldn't be a very enticing title for a movie. (It's also not the name of the Elmore Leonard book on which the movie is based.)

"Be Cool" actually bears only a vague resemblance to its vastly superior predecessor. John Travolta is back as Chili Palmer, mobster-turned-movie-producer, who now wants to switch to the music business. He still dresses all in black and he still whips out that "Look at me" line when confronting his enemies. And he seems to exist in a parallel version of Los Angeles where it's still OK to smoke in bars and restaurants.

When he's gone, which is often, with the myriad characters and subplots crammed into Peter Steinfeld's meandering script, the movie feels lost and wayward. But even when he's on camera, he's not the charismatic Chili Palmer you knew. Ten years in the sun and smog of Los Angeles seem to have softened his edges and sapped his sense of danger. He's strangely vacant—the straight man playing it bland while an assortment



COURTESY

André Benjamin co-stars in the "Get Shorty" sequel, "Be Cool."

of character actors and celebrities in cameos mug knowingly all around him.

Among them are Uma Thurman, relegated to the role of eye candy as the head of an indie record label; Vince Vaughn, stuck in a one-joke part as a low-level music executive who talks like a hip-hop thug; and Cedric the Entertainer as an Ivy League-educated music producer who can throw on a throwback jersey and go gangsta

when necessary.

Providing a couple of goofy laughs are The Rock, playing a gay Samoan bodyguard who wants to be an actor/country singer; and Andre Benjamin (Andre 3000 of OutKast) as a member of the rap group the Dub MDs, which is short for WMDs, or Weapons of Mass Destruction.

By now you're probably seeing a theme emerge: The film from director F. Gary Gray ("The

Italian Job," "Friday") is a satirical indictment of the way whites have co-opted black culture through language, clothing and music. As Sin LaSalle, Cedric the Entertainer makes the point in an eloquent speech to a room full of music executives, Russian mobsters and rappers. (Yeah, it's as complicated as it sounds.)

But the road to that moment of enlightenment is flat and repetitive. Despite Vaughn's natural comic timing, his shtick ("Mad respect for not givin' respect; I feel you") gets old fast. It felt like a stretched-out skit when Jamie Kennedy made a whole movie of that kind of character two years ago in "Malibu's Most Wanted."

Worst of all, "Be Cool" is often simply boring, despite its attempts to skewer the music business the way "Get Shorty" made fun of Hollywood. A great deal of time is spent discussing the contract of young, Beyonce-esque R&B singer Linda Moon (Christina Milian, in real life a young, Beyonce-esque R&B singer). Travolta and Thurman do it. Travolta and Vaughn do it. Travolta and James Woods do it. Travolta and Harvey Keitel do it on the living room floor in the middle of the night.

Even Stephen Tyler gets dragged into the talks, and his presence is another example of the difference between the sequel and the original.

A cooler film wouldn't try so hard to impress you.