

Collage of Cool

A completely comprehensible *bobrauschenbergamerica* at UO

bobrauschenbergamerica is awesome. From the moment the curtain... goes away, the audience is swept up in an endlessly entertaining cacophony of images and ideas.

Don't let the title intimidate you; you can say it. It's Bob Rauschenberg (a prominent mid-century artist)



America (this crazy cool country you live in), and the play is about both. Rauschenberg has been referred to as a neo-Dadaist and a pop artist, and was known for his "combines" made of trash and found items he scavenged on the streets of New York. His famous piece, *Charlene*, combines oil paint, mirror, newspaper, charcoal, fabric, wood and plastic. But the beauty of Charles Mee's theatrical interpretation of the artist is that you don't need to know a thing about Rauschenberg's work to enjoy the play. A viewer need only watch, react and be entertained.

This is not traditional theater. There is nonsense and noise, cushioning moments of extreme clarity. One vignette follows the next, with some storylines and characters carrying through and others vanishing. Some scenes are more comprehensible, some more meaningful, others are totally absurd. Many are all three.

But the whole thing makes perfect sense, which is not often the case with this sort of show. Sometimes, an inexplicable rain of ping-pong balls falling over the conversation of lovers makes their connection all the more meaningful. There are horribly uncomfortable moments, yet they don't worm inside your head

and make you dwell on their dark nature for weeks afterward. For the most part, this production is joyful in its questions.

It's impossible to single out one actor in *bobrauschenbergamerica* who shines brighter than the rest. The cast must work together as one organism to pull off a show like this. Pinpoint timing keeps each rollicking scene following hard on the heels of the previous, and keeps an actor from narrowly sidestepping a girl careening across the stage in roller skates. Director John Schmor masterminds a cohesive production, and his actors are to be commended for gracing the stage with style. Jonathon Taylor's design is a character in and of itself. The slowly deconstructing set changes and adapts to the action taking place — not unlike America.

University Theatre's production of *bobrauschenbergamerica* is that rare theater experience, as delightful as it is unique. I left the theater feeling I understood Rauschenberg, and the American experience, a little better.

EW

bobrauschenbergamerica runs Feb. 25 through March 12 at the Robinson Theatre in the UO's Miller Theatre Complex.

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