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ST. LOUIS THEATRE SNOB

The overture is part of the show, people. Please shut your pie hole.

The Fabulous Fox Theatre • St. Louis, MO

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Monday, September 1, 2014

HUMAN TERRAIN • Mustard Seed Theatre



Mustard Seed kicks off its season with a world-premiere by Jennifer Blackmer that focuses on an anthropologist embedded with a military unit in Iraq. The story is fictional, but the program is real. Established in 2006, a United States Army program called [The Human Terrain System](#) employs social sciences personnel to provide the military with some understanding of the local culture.

Mabry (Melissa Gerth) is the anthropologist -- a new PhD and skilled linguist, who spent her time in the army under the command of hard-nosed Captain Alford (B. Weller) -- sometimes at odds with her purpose, but well-intentioned. Along with ordering her to wear a sidearm for her own protection, he assigns a young soldier named Detty (Taylor Campbell) to accompany her as an armed escort. Both of these mandates make her job of winning the hearts and minds of the locals more challenging, but Mabry manages to do some good, and meets and forms a tentative friendship with Adiliah (Wendy Greenwood), an Iraqi woman. All of this is played out in flashback. When the play opens, Mabry finds herself in a small room, worn out and confused, and back in the States being questioned by a DA named Kate (Dawn Campbell) about a bombing in Fallujah, and her allegiance is questioned.

Blackmer's play keeps you engaged and curious up until the end, and considering the switches that happen between the past and present, Lori Adams's direction keeps the action running smoothly. Gerth also has to turn on a dime as Mabry, and once the action starts to ramp up, so does her performance that ends strongly. The Captain, hardened by what he sees and deals with, is tempered reliably by Weller, and Greenwood's wonderful portrayal of Adiliah is grounded and filled with honesty. Her conversations with Mabry, letting us in on some of Adiliah's story and point of view, provided some of the most interesting moments of the play. Dawn Campbell is smug and non-nonsense as Kate, and Taylor Campbell also does good work as Detty, a kid out of the heartland with dreams of his own, while John Clark plays Harrison, another young soldier who has seen all he cares to. Antonio Mosley rounds out the cast and does well as Kemal, a young Iraqi boy Mabry and the soldiers meet.



Wendy Greenwood (Adiliah) and Melissa Gerth (Mabrey).
Photo credit: John Lamb

John Stark's clever scenic design features long panels along the sides of the stage painted with sand and sky

with a small room that's rolled upstage or downstage. Michael Sullivan's lighting design, Jane Sullivan's costumes and Zoe Sullivan's sound design effectively bring the play to life.

The very last scene threatens to drain impact from the previous one, but still -- it's a tricky balancing act Mabry's in, and this play provides an intriguing look at this overlooked aspect of wartime, sure to give you some food for thought after the show.



Melissa Gerth (Mabrey) and B. Weller (Captain).
Photo credit: John Lamb

HUMAN TERRAIN

Written by Jennifer Blackmer

<http://stlouistheatresnob.blogspot.com/>

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on stage

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Directed by Lori Adams
Mustard Seed Theatre, [6800 Wydown Blvd.](#)
through September 14 | [tickets](#): \$25 - \$30
Performances Thursdays to Saturdays at 8pm, Sundays at 2pm

Cast:
Melissa Gerth (Mabry), Dawn Campbell (Kate), Wendy Greenwood (Adiliah), B. Weller (Captain Alford), John Clark (Harrison), Taylor Campbell (Detty) and Antonio Mosley (Kemal).

Creative:
Scenic design by John Stark; lighting design by Michael Sullivan; costume design by Jane Sullivan; sound design by Zoe Sullivan; movement and combat design by Shaun Sheley; weapons training, Devin Servais; props design by Meg Brinkley; language and cultural advisors, Laila Abdo and Ahmed Abuhaimeid; stage manager, Tanya Tweedy.



Melissa Gerth (Mabrey), Antonio Mosley (Kemal) and B. Weller (Captain).
Photo credit: John Lamb

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Saturday, August 30, 2014

THE SPITFIRE GRILL • Insight Theatre Company

Insight continues its season with a musical based on the [1996 film](#) of the same name -- a folksy, simple little tale of hope, set in rural Wisconsin.

Newly released from prison, Percy (full name, Perchance and played by Sam Auch) is drawn to the small fictional town of Gilead after seeing a photo of their Autumn colors in a magazine. The local Sheriff is Percy's parole officer, a bachelor named Joe Sutter (Pete Winfrey), and he wonders why anyone would want to come to this depressed, broke little town. Gilead may be picturesque in photos, but it's pretty dreary when you live there. The Sheriff helps her get a job at the one restaurant in town, the Spitfire Grill, where Percy meets its surly owner, widow Hannah Ferguson (Janet Wells) who, getting on in years, reluctantly agrees to take Percy on to help out at the diner. Hannah's been trying to sell the grill for years, but there haven't been any takers. Percy and her new buddy Shelby (Jenni Ryan) come up with

