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Entertainment Theater Reviews

Theatre: Go see Blunderland this weekend

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Contributor

There's a new show in town. It's hilarious, colorful, exotic; it's intimate, sad and personal; it's thought provoking and soul searching, and very funny; it's all these things and more. But unfortunately... it only plays this coming weekend. Two more performances, Friday night and Saturday matinee. I urge you to arrange to see it.

Blunderland is an original script, written by retired theatre professor Rufus Cadigan. It is based on the remarkable life of one of Rockford's own exotic characters, Bill Carlson, the revered and respected long time Deacon at St. Chad's Episcopal Church in Loves Park (Carlson passed away in 2012). But he was also known and much loved as "Miss Seaway Rose," a favorite entertainer at The Office Nightclub downtown.

But the show is even more special because the ingenious ninety-minute script is performed solo by one actor, the talented Andrew Harth, who has been featured in and praised by most of the theatres in the area and beyond.

This performance is an absolute tour de force for Harth. He is an absolute natural. He has complete control throughout. He captured his audience from the first moment, and held us rather like puppets, waiting for his next clever bit: vocal, facial, physical.

The script requires his telling of stories and incidents and describing lots of people from the past; and he created each of these characters as a separate entity, using a marvelous variety of voices, giving each one their own physicality,

with facial manipulation, distinctive 'attitude', and often even their very own gimmick gesture or stance. He gave each one a unique persona, whether bitchy or bawdy, macho or charming and coy, and each became real and memorable; not just for him, but for all those who were willing and able to open themselves to the imagination and share in this evening of art.

Yes, Andrew Harth is an artist. But it was his eyes that made me realize that this guy loves the whole creative process and that he is absolutely right there, all the time, investing his love in every new character, having a ball, and offering to share it with us.

The show was designed to include audience participation; and since the whole premise was letting "Bill" or "Miss Seaway Rose" tell the whole story directly to the audience, the performance was therefore entirely presentational. And since the action required him to "create" Miss Rose right there on the stage, he had to make a complete change in his appearance, from his casual street clothes at the beginning to complete drag.

He spent the pre-show chatting casually with the audience, joking with many, and then made his actual entrance from the back of the audience down the center aisle. Then during the course of the show, he made his complete change into Miss Seaway Rose, including wig, makeup, heels and hose and a gorgeous purple sequin and rhinestone gown. Very haute couture. And immediately the audience fell in love with her, just as we had with Bill in the first act. And you will, too. You'll find yourself smiling all evening.

Again, there are only two performances left: this Friday at 8 p.m. and a Saturday matinee at 2 p.m. Blunderland is sponsored by the West Side Show Room, and is performed in The Center for the Arts and Spirituality at the Emmanuel Lutheran Church, 930 3rd Ave. Go early; it can be tricky to find.

For more info, thewestsideshowroom.com or call 512-796-1772.