

Church & State

Theater, Comedy @ New World Stages (/newyork/theater/new-world-stages), Hell's Kitchen 📅 Until Sunday July 2 2017 💰💰💰

★★★★★ (2 user reviews)



TIME OUT SAYS



USERS SAY (2)



Theater review by Sandy MacDonald

Odds are, you already know where you stand on the gun-control debate, and Jason Odell Williams's sprightly little polemic won't do much to sway you. Still, he presents his argument so entertainingly, few would object to going along for the ride.

Authorial challenge Number 1 is engendering sympathy for the devil, incarnated as Senator Charles Whitmore, Republican of North Carolina, who's running for reelection on a Christian values platform. Success is all but in the bag—except when, in an awkward moment following the funeral of 29 gunned-down children (schoolmates of his own boys), he blabbed to an independent reporter (blogger) that the incident has shaken his faith in God.

As in Tracy Letts's *Man from Nebraska*, this epiphany does not go over well with Whitmore's wife, Sara (Nadia Bowers), a pugnacious and flirtatious Southern belle. Moreover, the Senator doesn't have the option of taking a bit of downtime in which to explore his newfound agnosticism: he's scheduled to deliver a clincher speech within a matter of minutes.

While Whitmore's campaign manager Alex Klein (Christa Scott-Reed as a nonrancid Kellyanne Conway) ties herself in knots attempting spin control, Sara draws on her inner Lady Macbeth. Both, competing madly, are powerless to prevent the porcine but semi-intelligent senator from going off-script.

Williams is adept at jacking up the tension, and he leavens potentially leaden debates with plenty of humor. Much of it transpires between the two women running Whitmore's life, but the senator gets in his share of zingers, too: This "compassionate conservative" is not as cookie-cutter as he might initially appear.

When's the last time you left a play complaining that it was too short? This one zips by so fast, you barely have time to catch your breath; its brevity may well be part of the message. Even if Williams's script ends up more as position paper than play, the writer-director, aided by a crack cast, has come up with an efficient delivery system for words that need to be said and heard.

New World Stages. By Jason Odell Williams. Directed by Markus Potter. With Rob Nagle, Nadia Bowers, Christa Scott-Reed. Running time: 1hr 10mins. No intermission