

Stephen Sachs' World Premiere of "Human Interest Story" at The Fountain Theatre



Matt Kirkwood (Carl Miller) and Rob Nagle (Andy Kramer) in Stephen Sachs' "Human Interest Story" on stage at The Fountain Theatre. Photo by Jenny Graham

Center Stage With...

Lady Beverly Cohn

Editor-at-Large Worldwide

Definition of Political Theatre: Plays that deal with compelling socio-political themes.

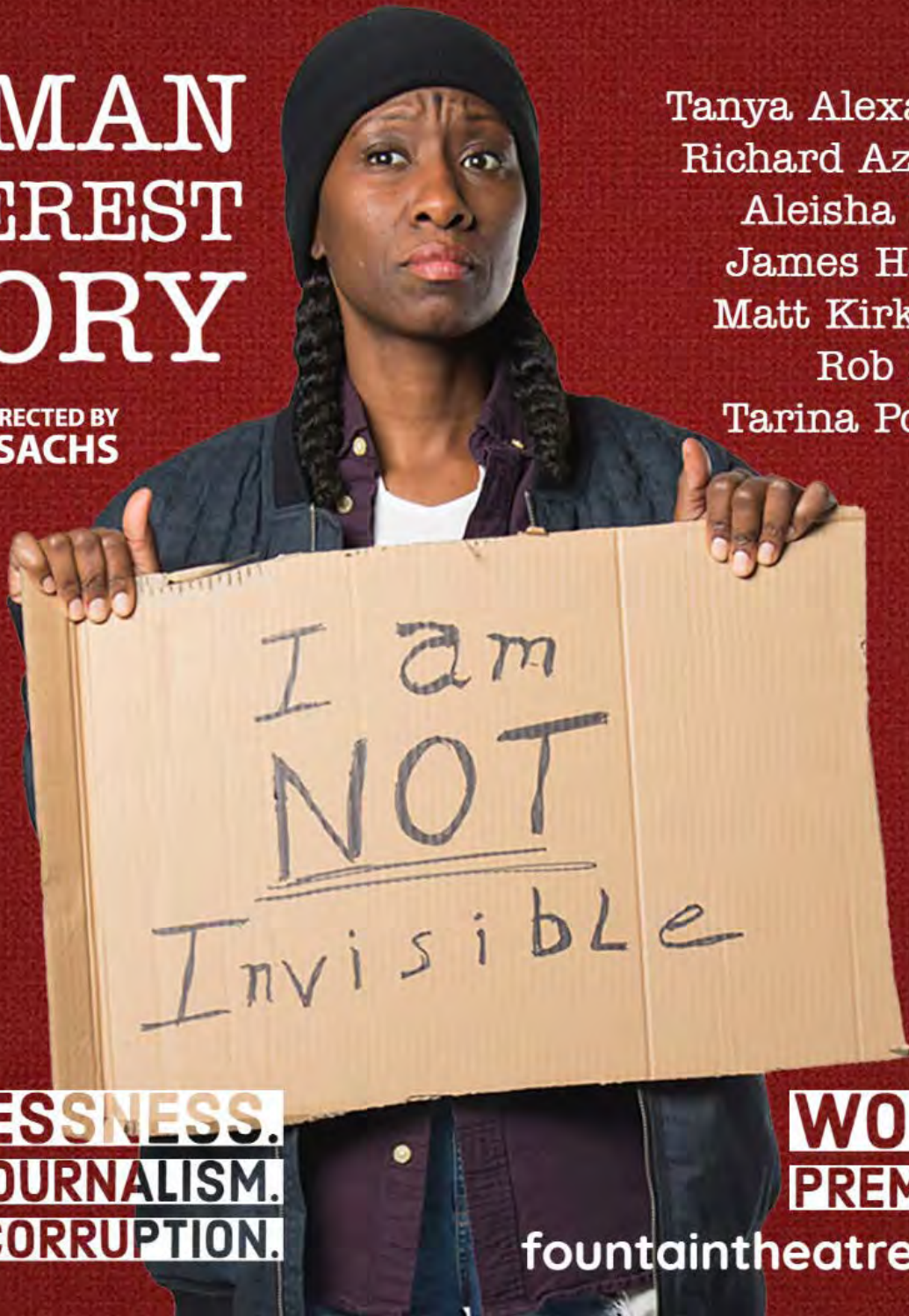
The use of theatre to influence public opinion on pressing socio-political issues is not a new theatrical art form. It dates as far back as ancient **Greek** playwright **Aristophanes' Lysistrata**, a play about women who withhold sexual favors from their husbands until they agree to stop going to war. There are too many to list but what comes to mind are playwrights **William Shakespeare, Bertolt Brecht, Henrik Ibsen, Molière, and Eugene O'Neill**, each of whom spoke to the socio-political condition through illustration rather than overtly identifying the problem. Some of the Broadway hits that would qualify with such a theme might include, **Angels in America, The Book of Mormon, Cabaret, Dear Evan Hansen, Hairspray, Newsies, Next to**

Normal, Ragtime, Rent, South Pacific, and Spring Awakening.

HUMAN INTEREST STORY

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
STEPHEN SACHS

with
Tanya Alexander
Richard Azurdia
Aleisha Force
James Harper
Matt Kirkwood
Rob Nagle
Tarina Pouncy



HOMELESSNESS.
TRUTH. JOURNALISM.
POWER. CORRUPTION.

**WORLD
PREMIERE**

fountaintheatre.com

Courtesy of The Fountain Theatre

Does **Stephen Sachs' *Human Interest Story***, loosely based on ***Meet John Doe***, qualify to be in that category? Maybe yes. Maybe no. Here's the storyline. The play begins in the office of **Carl Miller, (Matt Kirkwood)** editor of a newspaper, which is part of publisher **Harold Cain's (James Harper) Cainmedia Corporation**. **Andy Kramer**, very well played by **Rob Nagle**, is a journalist specializing in stories about the homeless. He has a strong following but on this day, due to cutbacks, he is fired, along with dozens of other

reporters. **Andy** is instructed to write his last column, "My final story will be on the homeless, and I might be one of them." Instead, he prints a letter supposedly from a homeless woman named **Jane Doe** who is about to give up on living, indicating she will commit suicide on **July 4th**. The letter, which results in a landslide of mail from readers, prompts the cold-hearted **Miller** to rehire **Andy** and assigns him the task of finding this woman. While walking through the park on the way to meet his friend for sushi, **Andy** comes upon an **African-American** homeless woman, excellently played by **Tanya Alexander**, holding a sign that says "I Am Not Invisible." She asks for a handout and soon the two of them engage in a conversation. She finds out **Andy** is a newspaper man and almost demands his attention saying that she read about **Jane Doe** and that she is that very same **Jane Doe**, which he challenges for good reason. She shares what it's like to be homeless and how she is treated by people, some of whom spit on her. As it turns out, this woman is highly educated and was a teacher laid off because of lack of funding. Our journalist, desperate to get his job back, formulates a plan whereby she would come forward as **Jane Doe** and takes his plan back to his boss who re-hires him to write a follow-up story. Meanwhile, the crass publisher is concerned that they are dealing with an "unhinged, fuc...ng homeless woman who has not been vetted. With the avalanche of letters pouring into the paper, however, he green lights the project, which includes **Jane Doe** writing a weekly column on the homeless, which **Andy** would write for her. **Jane** is now "cleaned up" and is ensconced in a lovely hotel room where she takes her first bath in a long time. She poses for photos in her new clothes and by and by is identified by a school principal as **Betty Frazier**, a teacher from her school.



Tarina Pouncy, (*Mayor Woods*) Rob Nagle, (*Andy Kramer*) Aleisha Force (*Megan*).

Photo by Jenny Graham

In Act II, **Jane** has become an internationally recognized voice for the downtrodden, as well as the empowerment of women, appearing on multiple talk shows including "**Ted Talk**," "**The Ellen DeGeneres Show**," and "**Good Morning St. Louis**." In one scene, she is interviewed by a militant host of a talk show out of **Oakland**, who restates just about everything concerning the oppression of blacks. While she speaks the truth, there needs to be a more theatrical delivery rather than just listing the facts, which becomes diatribe. The play is at its strongest in some of the scenes between **Andy** and his on again, off again girlfriend **Megan**, played by **Aleisha Force**. She is a high-powered journalist who writes for "**The Bulletin**." She has a strong sex drive, which she comments, "If I were a man, my sex drive would not be an issue." She berates **Andy** saying that, "Guilt is the only way you feel good about yourself," to which he replies, "I'm **Jewish**," one of the very few funny lines in the play. This is also true of the strong scenes between **Andy** and **Jane** where she discusses her concern for her homeless friends. Although he is complicit in what could be referred to as a charade, **Jane** reminds him, "You see me through white tinted glasses," telling him that her father was once a fourth grade teacher who drilled into her over and over, "Never trust a white man." In the meantime, the ambitious **Cain** is about to run for mayor and wants to use **Jane** as his spokesperson. He threatens her by saying "I am not as bad as you think; I'm worse." He has actually been stealing money from their non-profit charity to fund his campaign for mayor. How she handles it is quite interesting. **Andy** warns her that public opinion can turn on a dime, which it does, but not in the way you might expect. The rest of the cast, playing what amounts to mostly cardboard characters, include **Richard Azurdia**, and **Tarina Pouncy**.



Aleisha Force, Richard Azurdia, Tarina Pouncy, and Matt Kirkwood
Photo by Jenny Graham

Performed on almost a bare stage except for a table and a few chairs, **Matthew Hill's Video Design** is quite creative and is used as backdrop to support the onstage action. The photos range from bucolic park scenes to the interior of the luxurious hotel room, to city shots, and a haunting night scene. This device overcame the lack of any real set pieces. Other members of the excellent production team include **Jennifer Edwards** on lighting design, **Shon LeBlanc's** costumes, and **Peter Bayne's** original music and sound effects.

Unlike other plays that illuminate social issues through clever story telling, **Sachs' "Human Interest Story"** sinks into diatribe much of the time by reciting the domestic and international issues with which we are dealing, from global warming to the war in **Afghanistan**. It is during those moments that he is on a soapbox, making the play less interesting. It's as if his profound concerns are in search of a theatrical voice. That said, he deserves "A" for effort in trying to illuminate some of the world's life-threatening issues.



**Tanya Alexander as Jane Doe.
Photo by Jenny Graham**

The Fountain Theatre

5060 Fountain Avenue

Los Angeles, CA 90029

Run:

Fridays: 8:00pm

Saturdays: 2:00pm & 8:00pm

Sunday: 2:00pm

Mondays: 8:00pm*

Closing: April 5, 2020