

# *The Bellflower Sessions* Sizzles at the Whitefire Theatre Through Oct. 13

September 20, 2012 - By Annemarie Donkin

Celebrating its 30th anniversary season, the Whitefire Theatre presents the world premiere of Andy Bloch's *The Bellflower Sessions* for its fall season opener.

Directed by Bryan Rasmussen, the play follows the life of Jack Calvin, an unemployed "Everyman," (in an outstanding performance by Rob Nagle) who is desperately trying to figure out his life by spending long days blogging and ranting online much to the chagrin of Molly, his angry wife, sympathetically played by the lovely Marshelle Fair.

Therefore, in spite of his wife's efforts, Jack keeps turning down work, including a sales job offered to him by her best friend, Dexter, played by a powerful Kevin Benton (*White Men Can't Jump*, "The Jeffersons").

To make matters worse, Jack becomes paranoid and convinced that his wife is having an affair with Dexter and becomes obsessed with learning the truth.

Nagle (*Life as We Know It*; "NCI;" "Castle"; "Mad Men") is a Shakespearean trained actor who creates such a realistic character that Jack appears to literally snap right in front of our eyes.

As he rants and raves, Jack's scathing observations about life are spot on, proving that any one of us could go completely nuts given the right circumstances.

Yet, after finally breaking under the pressure of his wife's desperate pleas, Jack is ready to change his life.

So, Jack seeks help from his best friend, Grant (in a fabulous performance by Michael Monks), and begins therapy sessions with the beautiful and mysterious Dr. Wendy Bellflower (in a magnificent performance by the gorgeous and luminous Stephanie Erb).

After only one appointment, Jack's life only ends up becoming increasingly more complicated which results in highly unexpected consequences.

Indeed, as the "Bellflower sessions" continue, we find out more and more about Dr. Bellflower that turns the plot from funny to sinister.

It is a real pleasure to see these fine actors play off of each other as the story races to its tragic outcome that

PHOTO BY J.D. MURRAY



From left, Stephanie Erb and Rob Nagle star in *The Bellflower Sessions*, a black comedy about the breakdown of an unemployed "Everyman," that runs through Oct. 13 at the Whitefire Theatre in Sherman Oaks.

appears inevitable but shocking nevertheless.

Throughout the play, Bloch's sharp and clever dialogue cuts through the current zeitgeist and holds a mirror up to our own hopes, fears and bouts of paranoia.

As a former standup comic, screenwriter and Off-Broadway playwright, Bloch takes us to places few writers venture to go and the results are equal parts hilarious and terrifying.

*The Bellflower Sessions* is highlighted by a wonderful three-part set by John Burton that allows Jack to seamlessly transition from scene to scene as we witness his epic breakdown.

Veteran director Bryan Rasmussen keeps a tight rein on his actors, allowing them to explode at precisely the right time for full comic and dramatic effect.

The Whitefire Theatre is small but of the highest level. *The Bellflower Sessions* is not to be missed.

*The Bellflower Sessions* by Andy Bloch, Sept. 8 – Oct. 13. Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. General Admission: \$25; Students/Seniors: \$20. Tickets: [www.brownpapertickets.com](http://www.brownpapertickets.com). Information: (818) 990-2324. Whitefire Theatre, 13500 Ventura Blvd. (at Sunnyslope), Sherman Oaks 91423. Parking: street/meter/parking valet available. Warnings: adult themes, adult language, sexual situations, gunshots. Running time: 90 minutes and one intermission.