



Photo by Brittany Duck

stage review

Red Fern Theatre's *A Shot Away* Gives a Voice to Those Silenced

"The Few, The Proud." "Be All that You Can Be." These are just some of the ways the military uses to attract the many that enlist each year. However, beneath the handsome and dutiful men in uniform shown on television and moviehouse screens lies a darker side of the military that is never shown and almost never talked about: rape and sexual assault. **Red Fern Theatre Company**, an institution that strives to bring about change through powerful commentary in the shows they produce, explores these issues in **Donna Fiumano-Farley's** *A Shot Away*. With six different characters representing their real-life counterparts, whom the playwright interviewed during the four years of dramaturgical research prior to production, the play takes the words of the victims and sets them onstage. Against these six individual stories is the story of **Tina Priest**, an Army Private whose death yielded suspicious circumstances and is survived by her mother and twin sister.

Before the play has even started, the audience is greeted with Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the USA," with the words "I'm proud to be an American" sung in jubilant repetition, juxtaposed against **Katherine Akiko Day's** dark and minimalist scenic design. In the **14th Street Y**'s small black box theatre, by the back wall, we see a huge backdrop of an American flag; in the forefront, a "porch-like" setting, complete with a coffee table and wicker chairs. Just then, a single spotlight turns on, and we see Joy Priest (**Jackie Sanders**), Tina's mother, telling her daughter's story through the diaries and knick-knacks she left behind. Soon enough, Priest's story is interrupted by the stories of six others, whose silhouettes behind the backdrop soon reveal the following characters: Panayiota (**Laura Anderson**), a young Asian-American woman; KC (brilliantly enacted by **Dana Berger**), a tomboy; Amando (**Grant Chang**), a Filipino man; Shirley (**Elizabeth Flax**), a middle-aged Black woman; Marianne (**Jessica Myhr**), a self-professed "girly-girl," and Michael (**Jeff Pierce**), a seemingly all-American man's man.

While each of their characters are completely different, their stories start off on the same positive note, describing their initial interest in joining the military forces. KC, drunk with her friends at a bar, impulsively decides they all enlist together and in the end, turns out to be the only one who went through with it. Amando has always wanted to serve, but with no opportunity was there for him in his native Philippines, he comes to America and enlists. For Tina Priest, it came as a surprise for her loved ones that she would join, as she "loved life." Her story, which is told sporadically throughout, then turns from the portrait of a girl set on living a quiet military life in Fort Hood to having her life turn topsy-turvy as she is sent to Iraq.

Information of each characters' experiences is given to us little by little, one by one. Seemingly friendly first encounters with men of higher rank are described, and slowly we learn how these situations happen. They are stories we all heard before, but never in the context of the military, they are haunting. It is here where Sanders really shines as Priest's mother, as well as **Tara Ricasa** as twin sister, Danielle. The mother and daughter narrate Priest's experience in passionate detail, especially when it comes to the circumstances surrounding her sudden death. Her death was never fully investigated, instead listed as a suicide. The rest

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of the characters continue telling their stories: many of them staying silent about what they went through because of death threats or sense of pride (in the mens' case), while others sought help, but never got any. We hear the numbers, the statistics -- they are astounding. According to the show's program: in 2007, there was a total of 2,688 reports involving military sexual assault. 80 percent of those are never reported, which puts the number over a staggering 13,000 cases.

With a stellar cast and strong dramatic narrative, *A Shot Away* is both informative and relevant, now more than ever. In a country involved in two wars, we need to be sure that our men and women feel safe with their fellow soldiers. This piece comes shortly after a lawsuit was filed this past February against Defense Secretary **Robert Gates** and predecessor **Donald Rumsfeld** by seventeen former and active-duty members, alleging that not enough was done to stop and prevent rapes, as well as investigate crimes such as Tina Priest's death. Panayiota Bertzikis, shortly after her time in the military, started the **Military Rape Crisis Center**, with whom RFTC has partnered during the run of this production.

Those who know anyone in the military, or anyone who has been sexually assaulted, definitely should see this show. For more information on the Military Rape Crisis Center, go [here](#).

Posted by Jessica at 6:45 AM 2 comments  Links to this post
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SUNDAY, APRIL 3, 2011

♥ Link Love (4.3.11): Viral Video Edition

Link Love



(via daydreamdelusion)

- **Jimmy Fallon, Stephen Colbert, Taylor Hicks & The Roots take on *Rebecca Black*'s "Friday"** -- SO EPIC! I've already watched it 3 times in a row *and liked it*, not gonna lie!
 - ***Les Misérables* in 6 Minutes!** YouTube sensation and stage siren **Natalie Weiss** does "poppier" renditions of your favorites from Schonberg and Boubil's songbook.
 - **Twin baby boys having a conversation?** CAN I KEEP THEM?!
 - They finally made **LASER CATS: THE MUSICAL**. Need I say more?
 - Hahaha. Where was **this kid** when I was in DC?!

PERSPECTIVE Ken Davenport, Broadway, Off-Broadway, Theater

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