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## Review: Re:Union at Pacific Theatre

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Andrew Wheeler, Evan Frayne, and Alexa Devine star in Re:Union

Last week [Pacific Theatre](#) opened [Re:Union](#), a co-production with [Horseshoes & Hand Grenades Theatre](#) and the debut play from its Artistic Director, Sean Devine. It would prove to be a rare evening of theatre: intelligent, engaging, entertaining, and deeply thought-provoking.

The play takes its inspiration and characters from a mysterious and tragic real life event. On November 2, 1965, a Quaker named Norman Morrison drove to the Pentagon with his one-year old daughter Emily and, as an act of protest against the Vietnam War, immolated himself beneath the window of the Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.

The action of the play takes place in two distinct

time periods: in 1965, as Norman Morrison lectures to a class on ethical, moral, and spiritual responsibility, and grapples with feelings over the war in Vietnam; and in 2001, as his now-grown daughter engages McNamara in a series of intellectual and emotional encounters, preparing her own act of protest against the newly established Patriot Act.

Utilizing history as source material is an increasingly popular trend on stage and in Hollywood (Frost/Nixon, The Queen, The King's Speech, etc.) however, Devine avoids the common approach of simply dramatizing or summarizing an event, and instead uses it as a starting point for a more interesting, more human exploration.

Rather than document real-world events (the interactions between Emily and McNamara are of the playwright's invention), Devine uses Norman Morrison's sacrifice to examine notions of responsibility, how we grapple with the consequences of ours and others' actions, and the ways in which we try to bring goodness into the world. These are weighty, heavy topics, but the play never feels bogged down by their significance due to the crispness of the narrative and dialogue.

Devine manages to accomplish something with his script that few first time playwrights are able to do. Rather than having his characters wax poetic on the huge concepts being addressed, he keeps the dialogue natural and conversational. Devine trusts his casts' ability to convey the larger themes through subtext and nuanced acting, instead of spelling out every last idea on the page.

In this, he is very fortunate – the assemblage of actors are of the highest quality, delivering pitch perfect performances. Evan Frayne's Norman Morrison is a warm, instantly likeable man, whose

grappling transformation from reaching uncertainty to grim resolution is stunning to behold. Alexa Devine's Emily Morrison crackles with fanaticism through the first act, a facade that is chipped away in the second to reveal tenderness, vulnerability, and need. Andrew Wheeler absolutely nails the taciturn, systematic McNamara, bringing humanizing elements of humour, self-doubt, and regret to the role.

Rounding out the excellent script and cast is the venue and the integration of technical elements. The stage is an aisle space approximately 25' long and 15' across with the audience sitting on either side, looking across at one another. At various points in the show, the audience become the assembled White House press corps or Norman Morrison's class of students. The arrangement is a constant reminder of the theatricality of the piece, but also allows one to become more enveloped in the work- as the sense of separation created by a proscenium is absent. Jason H. Thompson's projections are at the cutting edge of sophistication and innovation, adding a rich layer of texture to the show, as they variously position us in the timeline, evoke the atmosphere of rainfall, integrate key plot points involving video cameras, and more (scroll down [the company's Facebook wall](#) to gain an appreciation of their integration).

Re:Union is theatre of the best sort: fresh, engaging, and bursting with an important, timely message. It does not only offer an evening's entertainment, but weeks and months of contemplation; as your mind will surely return to ponder its story, staging, and purpose, making it an experience that grows richer and more meaningful with time.

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