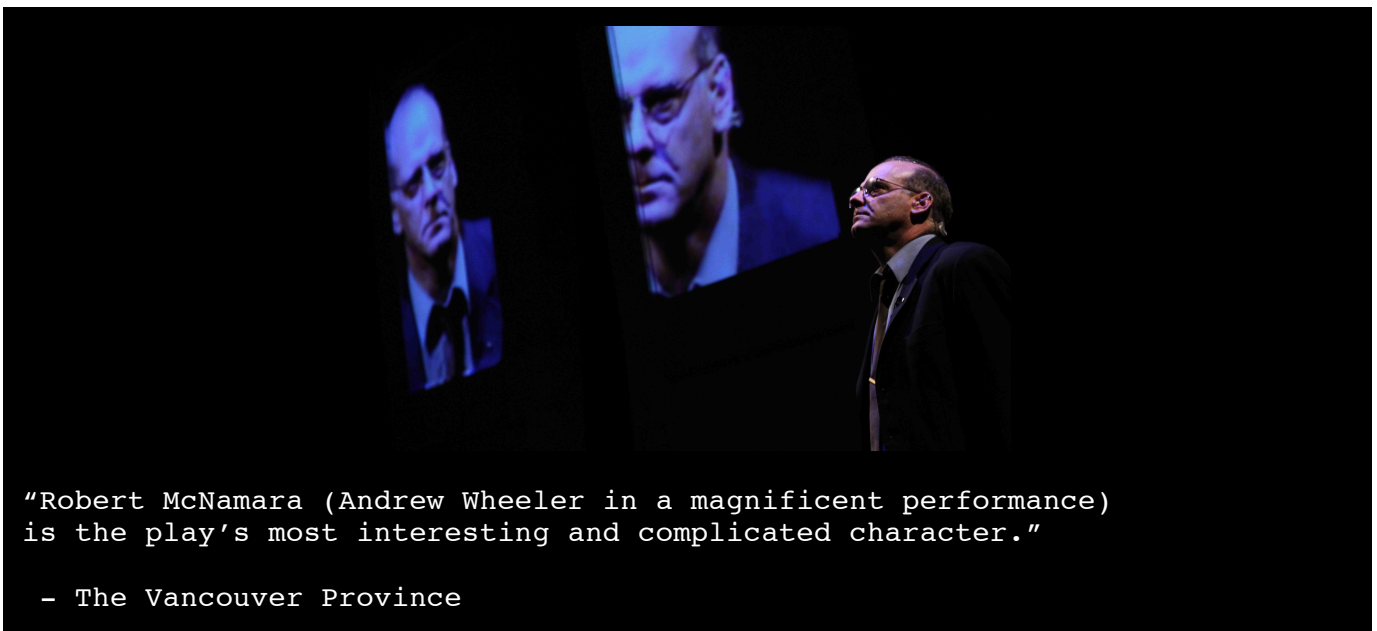


## Re:Union feels particularly relevant

BY COLIN THOMAS – GEORGIA STRAIGHT OCTOBER 24, 2011

*Re:Union* provides a thorough moral and intellectual workout, which makes it as unusual as it is welcome in Vancouver's current theatre scene. And the physical production is gorgeous.

The play dares to ask complex questions. In a terrifically smart and effective device, Devine's Morrison lectures a philosophy class on the difference between pragmatic ethics and religious morality. To support his view that the religious approach is superior, Morrison tells the Bible story in which Abraham very nearly sacrifices his son Isaac because he hears God's voice telling him to do so. Because their realities are so private, Abraham—and, at first, Morrison—are easy to dismiss as insane. But McNamara represents the ethical position, in which the end can justify the means. In McNamara's case, that led to a tragic escalation of the Vietnam War. More recently, it has led to water-boarding and other forms of torture.



There are holes in the script. But the play's great strengths, its intelligence and its compassion for physical suffering, more than compensate: as McNamara lectures about strategic bombing, we hear an eyewitness account of how that bombing was experienced on the ground, we see images of a blasted village, and we hear explosions; when Morrison's suicide-sacrifice finally comes, the liquid pouring over his body makes the moment movingly tangible.

As society struggles, with Occupy Wall Street, to articulate coherent resistance to institutionalized power, *Re:Union* feels particularly relevant.

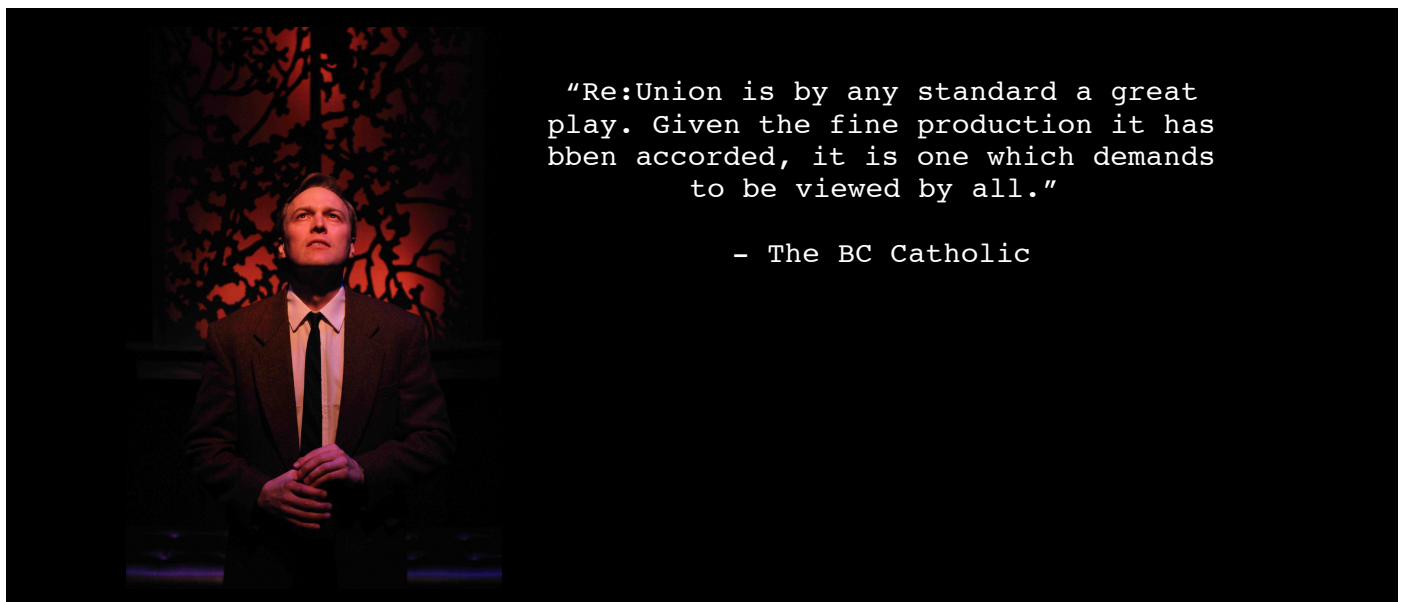
## There is power in *Re:Union*

Thought-provoking play asks tough questions about God & sacrifice

BY JO LEDINGHAM - THE COURIER OCTOBER 27, 2011

The Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac is a troubling one for Christians and non-Christians alike. The Old Testament God just seems to be messing with Abraham's head when he demands the sacrifice of his son Isaac and then—after Abraham has shown his willingness to obey—lets him off the hook. Abraham proves his devotion to God, but what of young Isaac? Did anyone ask him if he wanted to be part of God's experiment?

This is the point at which playwright Sean Devine sees—or creates—a parallel between Abraham and Norman Morrison, who on Nov. 2, 1965, doused himself with kerosene, lit a match and immolated himself outside the office of Robert S. McNamara, then U.S. Minister of Defense. Morrison, a Quaker and academic, was appalled by the bombing of North Vietnam and could see no better way to show his outrage. He took along his one-year-old daughter Emily, but, unlike Abraham who was excused by God, Morrison appears to have had a change of heart and handed her off to a bystander before lighting the match.



"Re:Union is by any standard a great play. Given the fine production it has been accorded, it is one which demands to be viewed by all."

- The BC Catholic

Directed by John Langs with set and lights by John Webber and sound by Noah Drew, this is a powerful and striking piece of theatre. Huge projections, including real-time video of the characters and black-and-white film clips of the Vietnam War, are thrown up against one wall. A sacrificial "altar" dominates centre stage—a constant visual reminder of the link the playwright implies between Abraham and Morrison.

This is challenging ground playwright Devine plows and he raises profound questions. Did Morrison stop the war? No. Did he make a difference? Maybe, maybe not. Was his self-immolation "that horribly selfish thing," in McNamara's words, or was it selfless? Are the consequences of inaction more dire than the consequences of action? These are huge ethical questions, and Devine

addresses them head-on. There's some heavy intellectual lifting here, but it's well worth putting your metaphorical shoulder to the metaphorical wheel. In a play like *Re:Union*, there are no easy answers.

Andrew Wheeler is McNamara who was, for a while, convinced that "data" and "acceptable kill ratios" would prove his strategy right. Wheeler portrays him as a highly complex man, a man caught in a moment in history where, according to Emily, he could have made a difference but failed to do so. Will he now make up for it? Evan Frayne is Morrison, a God-fearing man ready to sacrifice himself for a principle; "Let my life speak," Morrison declares. Frayne shows us a man desperately torn between his love for his family, country and God. Alexa Devine is Emily, and she presents the character as an intelligent, articulate and determined woman who comes to question the wisdom of what she is about to do. These are three gripping performances that guide us through the intellectual and philosophical deep waters of this play.

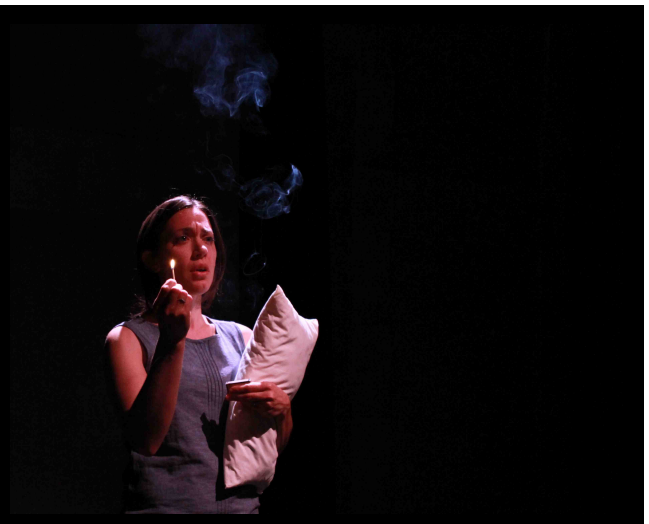
## Glossy production, unorthodox structure makes for a complicated *Re:Union*

BY JERRY WASSERMAN - THE PROVINCE OCTOBER 24, 2011

Watching Sean Devine's intelligent new play, it's impossible not to hear echoes of the Occupy Wall Street/Occupy Vancouver movement. The central character in *Re:Union* is Norman Morrison, the Quaker who burned himself to death in 1965 outside the Pentagon office of U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in protest against the Vietnam War. When he speaks about the responsibilities of "conscientious people in unconscionable times," he might very well be speaking to us. *Re:Union* asks a series of fascinating questions about guilt and responsibility, the need to take action against the unconscionable and the prices to be paid for inaction and for inappropriate action. The play and production bombard us with history and ideas, ethical ambiguity and complex theatrical technology to the point where nothing is entirely clear. That may be true to life but it's little comfort in unconscionable times.

"May I encourage you to consider seeing this production. It's a terrific example of contemporary theatre at its best: at the intersection of the political and personal, the historical and contemporary, the universal and the particular."

- Audience Comment

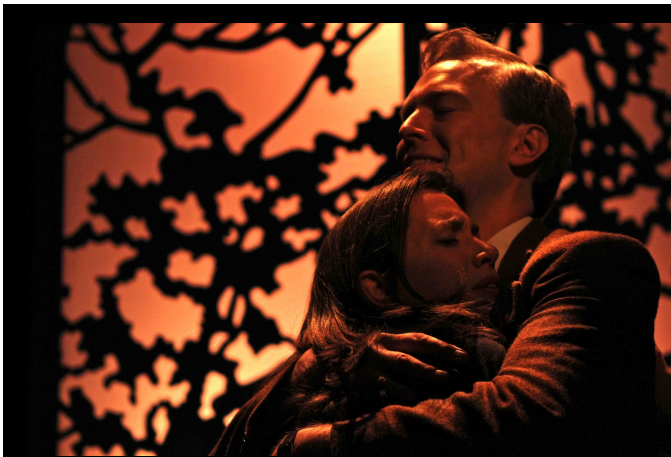


# Mission Accomplished

BY ANDREA WARNER – WESTENDER OCTOBER 26, 2011

Last Friday, President Barack Obama announced that all American troops in Iraq would be home for the holidays, thus ending a decade-long war that has long been likened to his country's Vietnam II. In a strange twist of meaningful coincidence, his declaration coincided with the opening night of playwright Sean Devine's debut, *Re:Union*, a multimedia drama borne from the horrific real-life story of Norman Morrison, a young Quaker who set himself on fire to protest the Vietnam War. Devine poses timely, relevant questions, and features moments of real clarity, humour and compassion throughout.

A lot of theatre wants to make you think, but it's an all-too-rare experience in Vancouver that after the curtain falls, you race home to research more about a play's subject matter. That night, reading about Vietnam and the arguments made about its echoes in Iraq, it struck me that Devine's *Re:Union* lays a claim that wars and plays struggle to achieve: mission accomplished.



"Not sure I've ever had the experience before in a play of a direct, heart opening, blinding moment of the vivid presence of God."

- Audience Comment

# An engaging and clever look at a dark time

BY MARK ROBINS – GAY VANCOUVER OCTOBER 25, 2011

With news of recent self-immolations by Buddhist monks in China, Vancouver playwright Sean Devine's *Re:Union* is suddenly elevated beyond the history books in an engaging and clever look at a dark time.

A cacophony of visual and auditory elements accompany Devine's play. Projection designer Jason H Thompson mixes live action video with historical footage to underscore both the then and now, even going ultra low-tech by today's standards as Morrison uses an overhead projector in several of his flashbacks. At times, Noah Drew filled the small Pacific Theatre with such a large sound that it was appropriately uncomfortable but at other times the subtle use of music and sound effects beautifully underscored the drama.

A compelling exploration of a small piece of American history within its larger context, Devine proves himself a playwright to watch. Not since Peter Morgan's *Frost/Nixon* have I found American politics so interestingly portrayed on stage.

"Re:Union fulfills  
Horseshoes & Hand  
Grenades Theatre's  
mandate – to produce  
tough, compelling,  
thought-provoking  
theatre."

- The Courier

