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Alexa Devine and Evan Frayne star in Vancouver playwright Sean Devine's Re:Union.

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STAGE REVIEWS Oct. 27

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RE: UNION

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.

But Morrison didn't simply set himself on fire. He did so with his baby daughter by his side, outside the Pentagon, in front of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's window. Devine's script

bounces back and forth between November 1965 and November 2001, imagining Morrison's daughter, Emily (Alexa Devine), wrestling with her father's legacy in a post-9/11 world. She sets a plan in motion to commemorate her father's sacrifice by committing an act of terrorism on the anniversary of his death and seeks out McNamara (Andrew Wheeler) for help.

Devine poses timely, relevant questions, and features moments of real clarity, humour and compassion throughout. Where *Re:Union* stumbles is when Devine indulges in phrasing that comes off as academic poetry: stilted, overly aware and unnatural. This is particularly evident in the scenes between Morrison (Evan Frayne) and Emily, as father and daughter confront the circumstances of his death. It's a marked contrast to the rapid-fire exchanges between Emily and McNamara, which spark with tension and intelligence. Wheeler proves a particular standout. His McNamara is the most fully realized character: gruff and self-important one minute, vulnerable and chastened the next.

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. *To Nov. 12 at Pacific Theatre, 8pm. Matinees: Sat, 2pm. \$16.50-\$29.50 from PacificTheatre.org. —Andrea Warner*

US AND THEM

Headlines Theatre artistic director David Diamond continues to probe how we build walls around ourselves — or let others do it for us — in his latest production, *Us and Them*. Using the audience to help the six characters change one small part of their behaviour, he then dissects how those small changes can lead to a much more harmonious conclusion. Walls are replaced by bridges. Every night there is a different outcome because every night the audience's input is different.

Familiar themes such as alienation, isolation, prejudice and despair are explored. Scenes from the Vancouver riot provide a dramatic backdrop, with images from the looting and police intervention projected on the large wall at the back of the stage. What's lacking, however, is a clear link between what happens to the characters on stage and what appears to be their participation in the riot. Is there a link? Some riots may be an outpouring of anger caused by social injustice but that doesn't seem to be the reason why Vancouver ran amok last June. *To Nov. 12 at The Cultch, 8pm. Tickets \$13-\$23 from 604.251.1363, Tickets.TheCultch.com. There will be a live, interactive, global webcast on November 12 at 8pm. —Martha Perkins*

DEBTS

A crowd of people in a small room; the doors slam shut behind you and suddenly the lights go out. The hairs on the back of your neck stand up, your skin tingles and you realize that it's mostly strangers, alone, in the dark. The moment lasts probably for no more than 10 seconds, but the panic actually sets in at around three seconds. Seven seconds of increasingly uncomfortable hell is the only transition you need to go from amused, interested observer to tense, uncomfortable participant. Welcome to Debts.