

# “Iago Syndrome” Looks at Uxoricide

BY BRIANNA HEADSTEN  
A & E Editor

Cal State East Bay’s new fall theater season introduces the world premiere of a new play, “The Iago Syndrome,” about four U.S. war veterans who murder their wives soon after returning from Afghanistan in 2002.

“The Iago Syndrome” explores the lives of four couples from completely different backgrounds as they struggle to fit in and experience some kind of normalcy at the Fort Bragg, North Carolina military base.

Over the course of the play, however, we see the lasting effects of war on the psyche of not only the men who experienced it, but also their wives. The unraveling of their domestic lives, bodies and minds is utterly fascinating, yet unimaginably horrific.

Both written and directed by Assistant Professor Marc Jacobs, “The Iago Syndrome” is a labor of love. “I had never directed a full length production especially with such a heavy subject matter, and it is much more work than directing something by someone else. I was definitely concerned about how it would be accepted,” said Jacobs.

Jacobs’ original idea for the play was quite different than the finished result. He began primarily focusing on the relationship of Iago and Emilia in Shakespeare’s “Othello.” However, he ultimately decided that the parallels between the Fort Bragg murders as well as the domestic violence that took place on a military base in “Othello” would work well together in one play.

“The Iago Syndrome” deals with very heavy subject matter in a respectful yet engaging way. With the recent violent shootings at Fort Hood, the thematic elements of the play continue to prove to be an issue with immeasurable relevance.

The cast does an excellent job of showing a full range of emotions, especially the anger, confusion and frustration that soldiers experience in war. Jacobs was also very pleased with the actors’ performances, saying “their sincerity and commitment overcame any lack of experience they may have had. I couldn’t be happier with their work.”

Vernon Gallegos and Caitlin O’ Leary, who play Master Sergeant Brandon Floyd and Andrea Floyd are the couple with the most seniority on base. Sergeant Floyd commands the men while Andrea makes introductions and hospitably welcomes

the wives to base. Though their relationship is never ideal, the physical and emotional wounds of war certainly take their toll on Sergeant Brandon, with Andrea trying to keep up a brave face. Caitlin O’Leary does a superb job of playing the endlessly happy Andrea Floyd, infusing humor and undeniable enthusiasm into the play.

Bradford J. Barnes and Grace Khasar, who play Sergeant Ray Griffin and Marilyn Griffin, share a particularly intimate bedroom scene. When the horrors of war seep into the desired intimacy of a relationship, problems occur that are unable to be clearly communicated. Two black-clad dancers that mimicked the actors’ words and movements physically manifested what the characters were unable to emotionally express.

Carlos Martinez and Rebecca Bujko play Sergeant Bill and Jennifer Wright. This particular couple brings the most reality to the play by showing every day events like arguments as well as the elation that comes from a marriage engagement and the birth of a child. These factors make one of the final scenes, a graphic depiction of a murder and suicide, all the more disturbing.

Sal Valladolid and Melanie Sutradhara portray Sergeant First Class Bert Nieves and Terry Nieves, who in a particularly touching scene show audience members what the final moments before being sent off to war could be like. Sergeant Nieves struggles to immerse himself in the familiarity of his wife and home before being deployed.

Iago, who is played by Joseph Mason, and Desdemona, portrayed by Rosy Hernandez, act as not only tour guides but also catalysts to some of the most climactic events throughout the play.

The play focuses primarily on the strength of the story as well as the actors’ abilities. It implements a minimal set that fully utilizes the space provided by using video projection as well as a scrim and moving background. The music used also helps set the tone with drum rolls, gunshots and bugle riffs breaking up the scenes, yet keeping in theme with the



**Othello reimagined:** Students Grace Khasar and Bradford J. Barnes perform in *The Iago Syndrome*

Photo/Luiza Silva

subject matter.

Jacobs purposely chose not to put a message into the play, saying, “there has always been war, and men who kill, who see their friends die. The potential to come back scarred is huge. I didn’t want to pretend like I had a solution. As long as there is war, there isn’t a solution. I just wanted this play to be a matter of throwing light on the situation.”

“The Iago Syndrome” plays at 8 p.m. today, Saturday and Nov. 20-21, and 2 p.m. Nov. 22 in the University Theatre, 25800 Carlos Bee Blvd., Hayward. Tickets, at \$15, may be reserved at 510-885-3118.

# Outlaw DJs Battle British Authorities in “Pirate Radio”



**Pirate Radio:** Rhys Ifans (above) as one of the British DJ’s in the ‘60s who broadcast from a ship to avoid government regulation.

BY ELIZABETH HEFNER  
Staff Writer

When the British government tries to stop offshore radio stations from broadcasting pop and rock music, eight dedicated disc jockeys stand up for music and fight back in “Pirate Radio.”

The highly entertaining film, directed by Richard Curtis (director of “Love Actually”), takes place in the 1960s, when the rock music the public wants to hear isn’t being played by mainstream radio stations. The film tells the story of the Radio Rock, the ship that hosts a group of rebellious and dedicated DJs who are broadcasting music they love while defying the government.

Formerly titled “The Boat That Rocked” for the U.K. release, the film has a cast of many talented actors, including Philip Seymour Hoffman (Capote), Bill Nighy (Pirates of the Caribbean), and Rhys Ifans (Notting Hill).

The film centers on the issue of pirate radio stations at risk of be-

ing made illegal, but the real entertainment comes from the bond the characters develop and their adventures onboard.

The chemistry between the cast is undeniable and makes the movie easy and enjoyable to watch. The film delivers a perfect mix of hilarious moments with bits of drama included, creating nonstop entertainment.

In this amusing film, everything from a young man’s first sexual experience to an extreme game of “chicken” is made into a rewarding comedic experience.

Philip Seymour Hoffman, who plays the only American DJ on board, gave a stellar performance as a truly devoted lover of rock and roll. Bill Nighy also had one of the more memorable performances as the ship’s loyal captain.

Sixties hits play throughout the movie and make you feel as though you’ve been transported back in time, and the upbeat mood of the film resonates the feeling that freedom and expression are worth fighting for.

# “Large Animal Games” A Fun Caper

BY MELANIE CRAWFORD  
A&E Editor

Impact Theatre in Berkeley is known for its sometimes offbeat, but always hard-hitting productions. This winter’s production of “Large Animal Games” definitely meets up to Impact’s reputation.

The play, which runs 75 minutes, is a world premiere play written by Steve Yockey.

Its seven players initially appear to be acting in separate individual vignettes but what binds them together becomes apparent fairly quickly.

Laughs come easily as the actors reveal the quirks of their characters: Rose comes home from a European vacation with Miguel, a Spanish “boyfriend” with whom she can’t communicate because he speaks no English—but that’s okay with her. Then there’s Stan, engaged to Alicia, who has the peculiar (and secret) habit of wearing women’s lingerie.

Alicia is horrified to discover this, because she’s totally into appearances and what others think of her. Valerie is a woman whose first big game expedition doesn’t quite meet up to her lofty expectation. And Jimmy, the lingerie salesman, pulls them all together.

As the play goes on, deeper meanings become apparent. One of the most important concepts regards the expectations we have for others and ourselves. Sometimes we have very definite ideas of what we think we want or need, and in the end, find out there’s a much better way to look at life and act upon it. But it can be painful, or appalling, or outrageous along the way. And sometimes we discover that our expectations are much more about ourselves than about the other person.

This troupe of actors worked very well together, smoothly moving from scene to scene in rapid succession. Although there are very few props, they are used skillfully and precisely.

Jai Sahai’s character, Jimmy, is played with just the right balance of mystery mixed with common sense advice for his customers. Leontyne Mbele-Mbong’s (Valerie) continually changing outlook on her big game expedition (when she actually shoots a gazelle, she is completely anguished) shows a fine range of emotions. The exchanges between Rose (Elissa Dunn) and Nicole (Cindy Im) regarding Rose’s scandalous choice to bring a non-English-speaking man back with her from Europe, after having barely met him, are down-to-earth and realistic. By the end of the play, the audience knows that each individual and their own reality has been touched or changed by the events that have taken place.

“I really liked Cindy Im’s character, Nicole,” said Julie Elder of Castro Valley, who attended the play Saturday night. “She played her part so naturally that I really believed she could be that character.”

“Large Animal Games” continues Thursday to Saturday, 8:00 p.m., through Dec. 12, at La Val’s Subterranean, 1834 Euclid in Berkeley. Tickets start at \$12. To make reservations, call 510 464-4468 or check it out on Impact Theatre’s website, impacttheatre.com.

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