

## Fear Factor: Canine Edition

John Grady—Playhouse Studio

I walked into what I thought was just another story of a man and his dog. Sure, I got that, and more. John Grady masterfully takes you into his life and his dog's life in New York City. And the total dedication of his relationship with his wonderful companion. Well, perhaps not totally dedicated; there were others (as in the opposite sex). However, the more his life gets tangled up with other relationships, the more he relies on the friendship and faithfulness of his canine, who gives out so much in love and therapy. It is the end that is always hard to deal with, both in life and in this play.

Still, a beautiful story of a man and his dog.

Kevin Campbell

## Under the Mango Tree

Ra Ra Wai Production—Warehouse

This beautifully produced play was about an East Indian girl who is in love with her village, her land, her family...and life. She whirls thru characters of her grandma, and father, and telling stories of losing her mother at a young age. This is interspersed with traditional but Bollywood-type dance and song. Everything centers around the ever-present mango tree nicely lit up in the background.

The story carries on with her father leaving his homeland to make it in the prosperous country of Canada. There are sad and funny stories of cultural differences shared thru mail back and forth. While the young girl yearns to be with her father, she carries on with her own life and love, and her own family. In the end, it is her father she deeply misses in her life. This was an honest, joyful portrayal of father-daughter relationships, particularly those played out against uprooted cultures.

Kevin Campbell

## Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex \*But Were Afraid to Text

The Magnificent Humble Boys—Son of Warehouse

The title refers to a groundbreaking 1970s book about sexuality written by Dr. David Rubin, except for the final word, which was "ask" in the title of Rubin's book. (There was also a movie with the same name, featuring among others Gene Wilder and Woody Allen.) During the show, audience members are encouraged to text questions on sex and love, and the two actors answer the questions to the best of their ability, occasionally breaking into prepared bits which usually include songs. Shelby Bond and Vinny Cardinale don't bring the credentials of Rubin or Masters and Johnson to this production, but they do bring a lot of charm and comic timing.

While their answers borrow a lot from pop psychology, their prepared bits are clever and well-done. And in fairness, I don't think these two young men see themselves as the next Dr. Phil, although

you could do far worse than the advice they dole out. They sing very well together, kind of like the Kingston Trio minus one, and the songs are clever and occasionally touching. Since they are in Son of Warehouse, I recommend attending early shows if possible until the heat wave ends.

Kevin Longfield

## The Big Smoke

FRINGETASTIC!—Cinematheque

Jer (Jeremy) Banks has donned the combined hats of actor/monologist for his highly-regarded solo show, *The Big Smoke*.

In this excellent script by Ron Fromstein, Banks portrays Tommy, a young man on the verge of leaving his hometown of Wawa in northern Ontario and moving to Toronto. A move such as this is like a rite of passage, or as Banks says in his narration, "Everyone leaves Wawa at least once in their lives."

However, Tommy isn't moving to Toronto simply to seek his fortune. He's coming out of the Wawa closet. Yet he doesn't seem to fully realize this or the impact this will have on his life in *The Big Smoke*. Living in Toronto is complicated enough—Tommy seems forever on the verge of turning it into a confusing mess.

Banks is an ultra-fine monologist who is as engaging on stage as he is in person and has the audience wrapped around his little finger. He takes on up to a dozen or more characters in this play, and each portrayal is seamless and notable. Add to this his skill in physical acting, and he's the complete package. He uses every bit of his talent to make Tommy not only real for us, but approachable.

This is quite a feat when you realize Banks is playing a character who is bouncing around more frenetically and clumsily than a beachball in a hurricane while trying to come to terms with his gay self. The ending of this script screams "SEQUEL!" Indeed, we want more of both Jer and Tommy.

Robin Chase



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Rogue Cop picks up a gun and takes you for a ride.

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