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Leah in Vegas

by [Martin Denton \(/Category/Author/Martin Denton\)](/Category/Author/Martin Denton) · August 18, 2014

Leah in Vegas is one of the most satisfying new American plays I've seen all year: it's a truly compelling story told with humor, maturity, intelligence, and heart. It should be one of FringeNYC '14's biggest hits.

Leah is a woman in her late 20s who has just been released from a nine-month stint in prison. She returns to her family home in Northern California, which is now occupied only by her mother, her father having died a few years back. She hasn't been here in a decade; she left right after high school, with sweetheart Jonathan (who became her husband), and went on to a new life in Los Angeles.

The reunion between Leah and her mom, Mary Anne, is uncomfortable to say the least. Playwright Kara Ayn Napolitano handles this scene with humor leavened with authenticity, letting us into a situation that is almost certainly foreign to most of us (how many in the audience have a grown child who served time in prison and is now coming home, at least in part because that's a condition of her parole?). This balance is maintained throughout the play, as the stakes get higher and the circumstances become somewhat more outrageous, Napolitano never goes broad, never demeans or pokes fun at any of her characters, even when they make choices that are easy to second guess. She respects their humanity, and as a result, so do we.

The first night back home, Mary Anne invites Leah's former best friend Brenda to dinner, and the two younger women eventually start to bond once again. This leads to the play's main throughline, alluded to in the title -- Brenda and Leah head off to Vegas, and adventure.

A lot is revealed about all the characters as the play moves roaringly toward its conclusion, including some of the information we're expecting and quite a bit that's surprising. It all feels real, and the play's climax and then denouement feel both earned and rewarding. We come to care about these three women, and to understand how each of them got to the place they are. And we root for them to move ahead in their lives.

Kristin Skye Hoffmann's direction of *Leah in Vegas* is exemplary, with nary a wasted moment. The cast of four is outstanding. Jenna D'Angelo in the title role is completely sympathetic despite her character's tendency to rashness; Leslie Marseglia's Brenda is fully fleshed out when she could simply be comic relief. Samantha Cooper plays two smaller roles with great skill. Victoria Bundonis is nothing short of revelatory as Mary Anne; again, this woman could just be a figure of fun, but the actress, writer, and director won't allow that--in a way, Mary Anne is almost a second protagonist of this play.

I loved *Leah in Vegas* because it treats its characters and its story--and its audience--as grown-ups; there is, for example, a terrific moment where Leah tells Brenda that prison isn't fun--it's not TV, she says, it's lonely and it's boring.

And one more thing for those interested in gender parity: kudos to this almost entirely female production team! Napolitano has written four excellent roles for actresses here, and her collaborators have brought them to life brilliantly. I hope many more women will get to tackle these characters in the future. For now, enjoy the great work being done by this cast and crew at FringeNYC.

More about the shows mentioned in this article:



Leah in Vegas 64E4 Mainstage (64 East 4th St.) · Aug 12, 2014 - Aug 23, 2014

(http://www.fringenyc.org/basic_page.php?ltr=L#Leahin)

More about the playwright in this article:



KARA AYN NAPOLITANO

(<http://www.indietheaternow.com/Playwright/kara-ayn-napolitano>)

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Over Here

In *Over Here*, Issam--a young college student from New Jersey who emigrated to America with his parents from Palestine when he was six; he's now a citizen of the US--and Gilad--an Israeli at NYU, who has already served his time in the Israeli Army--meet at the construction site where the World Trade Center debris is still being cleared in the summer following the destruction of the towers. They feel each other out and quickly bond, their direct experiences with bombings and war and their shared concern for humanity trumping religious differences. ([/Content/Article/over-here](#))

tangleplay

tangleplay, from boom! theater company, written and directed by Steven Ackley, is my favorite kind of theater. It's truly immersive, by which I mean that as an audience member you never get to just sit back and passively let what's happening roll over you. Instead, you have to be present the whole time: utterly engaged and attentive and aware of what's unfolding on stage. ([/Content/Article/tangleplay](#))

The List (The Greatest, Most Absurd 100 American Movies Mash-Up Parody Ever Stitched Together)

In his Author's Note for *The List (The Greatest Most Absurd 100 American Movies Mash-Up Parody Ever Stitched Together)*, Bryan T. Donovan talks about the inherent folly in creating a list like the American Film Institute's 100 Greatest American Films of All Time. "Somewhere along the journey I became frustrated by some of the choices on the list," he says. "Movies are art. Art is subjective." ([/Content/Article/the-list-the-greatest-most-absurd-100-american-movies-mash-up-parody-ever-stitched-together](#))

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