



BAGHDAD BULLETS OVER BROADWAY: (left to right) Arian Moayed & Robin Williams in the Iraq drama *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*. Photo: Carol Rosegg

Theater Review

Robin Williams gives Iraq saga *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* its dramatic bite



BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO

Written by Rajiv Joseph

Directed by Moisés Kaufman

Richard Rodgers Theatre

226 West 46th Street

(800-745-3000), & (877-250-2929) www.BengalTigerOnBroadway.com

By David NouNou

Rajiv Joseph's thought-provoking *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* poses myriad questions to which there will be no satisfactory answers. In 2003, were the Iraqi people really better off after the American invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein? Was the greed and the looting of American soldiers in Iraq any better than what Saddam did to his own people? Where is the existence of God and why would these atrocities take place if He really existed? Why does the conqueror always destroy the beauty that was created and leave carnage in its place? Are we really smarter in the afterlife and do we see things more clearly? Once we are capable of killing, and feeling that superiority over our tormentor, how much more of our soul do we lose?

And my own question is this: Why do playwrights feel they always have to insert loud, shrill music (in this case rap and hip-hop) to overstate their point? Is it to keep us awake, or do they have such little faith in their work that they feel the music of the day has to represent the times? Since *Apocalypse Now*, in which rock was the music of the day and integral to the movie, playwrights feel they have to insert blaring music to allow for a set change and convey the mayhem going on.

Obviously, the main reason for seeing this show is to marvel at the multi-talented Robin Williams. When he is onstage, the show and the stage both come to life. As the title character of the play, the Bengal

Tiger, he is understated, irascible, and a joy to watch. Although this is his long overdue Broadway debut, he is in such control of the stage that one wishes his part were larger.

We first see the tiger in his cage after the invasion of Iraq guarded by two moronic American guards, Kev (Brad Fleischer) and Tom (Glenn Davis). Tom is bragging about his looting of Saddam and his son Uday's palace and taking a gold pistol and a gold toilet seat as his booty, and follows to taunt the hungry tiger. The tiger rips his arm off and is shot by Kev. Thus starts the entrance of the ghosts roaming around the living and haunting them on a daily basis. So Mr. Williams is around as the philosophical tiger, yearning for his salvation. Mr. Williams is giving what might be one of his most understated and beautiful performances of his career. I wish I could say the same for Mr. Fleischer and Mr. Davis.

In two pivotal roles are Hrach Titizian as the ghost of Uday Hussein who torments his former employee, his gardener, Musa (Arian Moayed), the maker of the beautiful topiary that are in Uday's garden and now working as a translator for the Americans. The guilt of bringing his sister to Uday's garden to see the topiary and being raped by Uday is a guilt Musa lives with on a daily basis. They imbue their characters with depth and texture and not the stereotypical characters portrayed in movies as just the bad guys.

There are a lot of good points in *Bengal Tiger* that could have benefited even more with tighter direction from Moisés Kaufman, who should have curtailed the endless screaming and chattering in Arabic (with no translations), all of which are incomprehensible to most American audiences, and we are left to our devices to make meaning of it. One can only hope that Mr. Williams will come back to Broadway in the near future in a more accessible play.

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Editor's Note: www.StageZine.com, celebrating our 1-Year Anniversary on the Internet. We want to express our gratitude to all the theater PR professionals, industry organizations, and, most of all, our readers, followers and fans for their continued support and kind words throughout the past year, helping make www.StageZine.com a success.

Broadway Listings

NouNou On Broadway

Broadway Capsule Reviews by David NouNou

ORIGINAL DRAMAS



CAGED 'TIGER' UNLEASHED: (left to right) Robin Williams, Brad Fleischer & Glenn Davis in *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*. Photo: Carol Rosegg



BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO

Bengal Tiger At the Baghdad Zoo is often a thought-provoking play that asks the viewer many philosophical questions. Are the Iraqis any better now that their country is in rubble and ruins than when before they were invaded by the Americans? Is the looting and ravaging done by the Americans any less offensive than what Saddam and his son, Uday, did to the country? Is there really a God to pray to that allows these atrocities?

There are three wonderful performances that elevate this show above the sounds of gunfire, blasting, and mayhem. The exquisite performances of Robin Williams, as the caged and then ghost of the Bengal Tiger; Hrach Titizian as Uday, Saddam's tyrannical son; and Arian Moayed, the gardener who created the beautiful topiary, in Uday's garden, and is now the translator to the Americans. One only wishes that Mr. Williams had a bigger part and we could have enjoyed more of his exacting performance. We will just have to wait until Mr. Williams returns to Broadway in a more uplifting venture

RICHARD RODGERS THEATRE, 126 W. 46th St., (800-745-3000) & (877-250-2929).

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