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NEWS

# Play Time – More Provocative Words From Stephen Sachs

**Cynthia Citron** - 3 days ago - no comment - [cynthia citron](#) , [play time column](#) , [smdp](#) , [Stephen Sachs](#)



Nobody will dispute the obvious fact that multiple-award-winning playwright Stephen Sachs is an extraordinary wordsmith. He explores his passions consistently and succinctly and expresses them from his own compassionate perspective. And he chooses and directs some of the finest actors on the planet to deliver his thoughts.

His plays have dealt with the systematic deterioration of America's values and freedoms and the encroaching disappearance of civility among its citizens. He deals with the effects of racism, cynicism, corruption, indifference, the loss of journalistic integrity, and the hopelessness and fears that continue to plague our society.

Sometimes, though, he gets carried away and offers a long, intense play that could use just a little bit of editing. Such a play is "Human Interest Story" which is currently having its World Premiere at Los Angeles' celebrated Fountain Theater.

It takes place among newspaper people in a city that looks like New York when viewed through the floor-to-ceiling windows that cover the back of the set. But it isn't New York, it's a medium-size middle-American city that happens to have a lot of excessively tall buildings.

As the play opens, a newly installed managing

editor at the City Chronicle (a dastardly Matt Kirkwood) is throwing his weight around by firing 50% of the staff. Among them is the popular columnist Andy Kramer (forcefully portrayed by Rob Nagle) who periodically writes about the homeless and other people living in poverty in this city.

Aiming to retrieve his lost job, Kramer constructs a heart-breaking letter ostensibly from a homeless woman calling herself Jane Doe who, in desperation, is planning to commit suicide on the 4th of July.

Kramer presents the letter to his editor, who immediately envisions it as a circulation-building national story and orders Kramer to find the woman and continue writing about her. But since Jane Doe is a figment of Kramer's imagination, he finds himself, like Hamlet, hoist by his own petard. Luckily, however, he finds a scruffy homeless woman (Tanya Alexander) in a nearby park carrying a placard announcing "I am NOT invisible!", and after carefully interviewing her he offers her the "job" of pretending to be Jane Doe.

Reluctantly, she accepts after he promises to write all her speeches and stand by her as she delivers them. He fills the newspaper with stories about her, and her "speeches" are so compelling that she quickly becomes a national heroine. She appears on television talk shows, magazine covers, and at significant public events. And she is taken up by the owner of the newspaper, Harold Cain (James Harper), a corrupt Trump-like bully who wants to become the mayor of the city.

Cain ensconces her in the plush Fairview Hotel, fills her closet with a fashionable wardrobe, and establishes a non-profit foundation in her name, from which he steals public donations in order to fund his mayoral campaign.

The press eats it up, but Jane Doe soon becomes tired of the charade. "This is not me," she tells Kramer.

Meanwhile, a reporter named Megan (Aleisha Force) who has been engaged in an off-and-on relationship with Kramer and knows the truth about Jane Doe obtains an interview with her and writes the story for her own paper. It is published just before Jane Doe is set to make a speech before 52,000 people at the City Center.

At the Center Harold Cain suddenly shows up and loudly denounces her as a fraud and claims that she is the one who stole the money from the foundation. Instantaneously, the crowd turns against her, shouting and booing until she is escorted off the stage.

In the midst of the plot the real messages of the play are articulated. In a shouted outburst Cain tells Jane Doe that only a handful of millionaires own the media that tells people what to think. "The truth is whatever we say it is," he tells her. And Kramer and Megan confront each other and wind up confessing their perceived flaws and disappointments. But the most damning diatribe comes from "Jane Doe" as she accuses Kramer of having exploited her and pretending that he knows what it's like to be black. "I am not nobody," she shouts. "We

won't always be homeless, but we will always be human." And, she adds, "I'm not making speeches to make white people feel uncomfortable. My message is hope."

In the end they wind up with a soft discussion of their families and personal experiences and the play simply peters out, so that the audience is left with a sense of unclarified ambiguity.

Two additional comments. Kudos must be given to Richard Azurdia who, as a member of the Ensemble, beautifully handles a multitude of parts that fleshes out the goings-on among the principals.

And also, special kudos to Matthew G. Hill who as Set and Video Designer keeps the play moving briskly with additional TV screens that amplified the story and enhanced the sets.

"Human Interest Story" will play at the Fountain Theatre, 5060 Fountain Avenue, Los Angeles, Fridays at 8pm, Saturdays at 2 and 8, Sundays at 2, and Mondays at 8pm through April 5th.

Call 323-663-1525 for tickets.

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