

HOLDEN

"Compelling ... the entire production holds you in a disturbing grip."

-The New York Times

"Provocative ... a Sartre-esque purgatory."

- The Philadelphia Inquirer

"Outstanding cast and direction... we should all take heed of the timely messages...masterfully delivered by George & Co."

- DCMetroTheaterArts

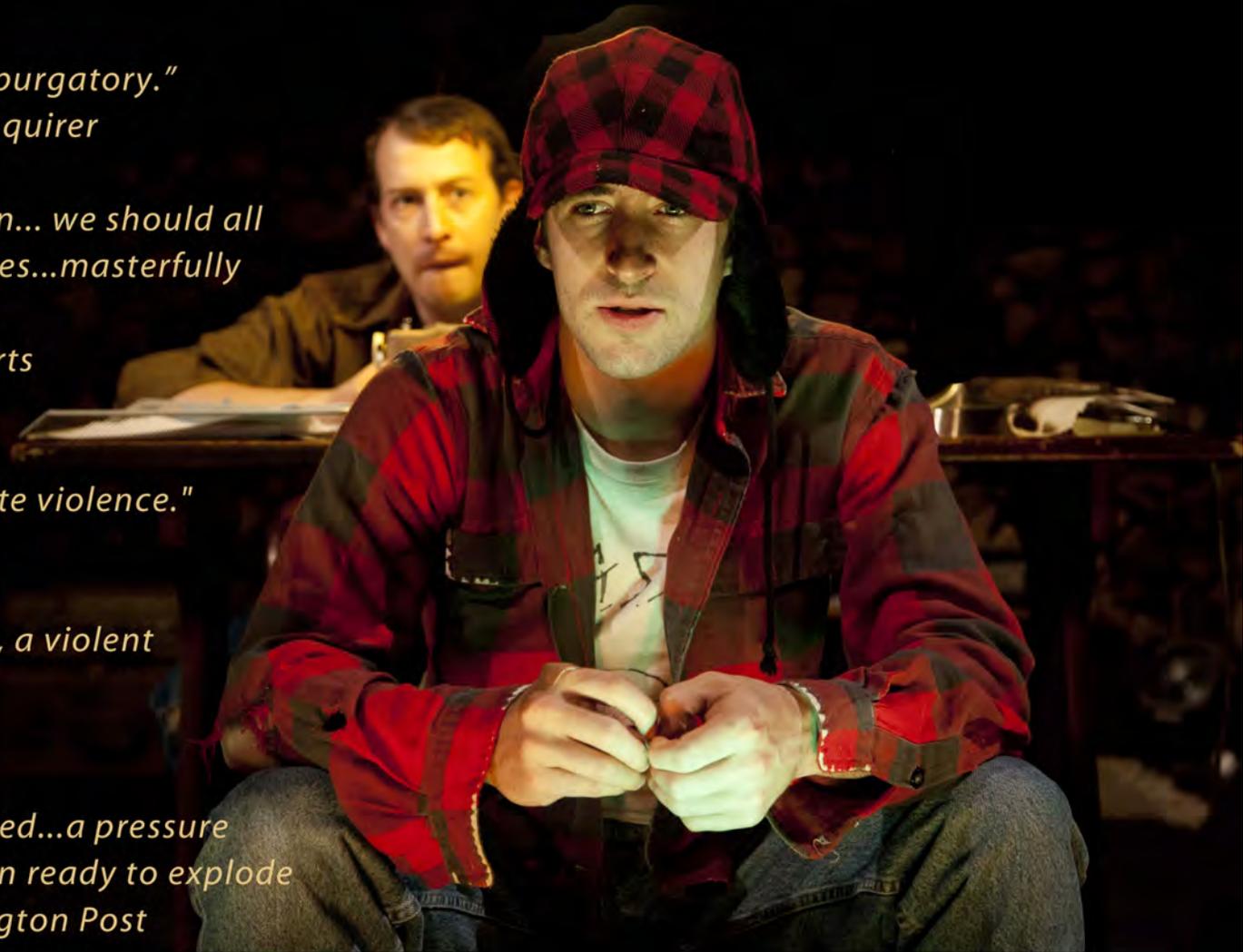
"Holden renders articulate what is too often wasted in mute violence."

- The Theatre Times

"A story of historical reckoning, a violent punch...Stunning."

- The Daily Beast

"fascinating...testosterone-fueled...a pressure cooker of unresolved frustration ready to explode without warning." - The Huffington Post



A TRAGICOMIC PIECE,
PLUMBING A DARKER
DIMENSION OF J.D.
SALINGER'S FAMOUS
NOVEL - THE CATCHER
IN THE RYE. A FEW
OBSESSIVE SUPER-FANS
HAVE TAKEN UP
RESIDENCE IN
SALINGER'S PRIVATE
WRITING BUNKER.
UNBEKNOWNST TO THE
RECLUSIVE AUTHOR
HIMSELF, THEIR
MISSION TO GET
SALINGER TO PUBLISH
ONCE MORE SPIRALS
INTO A LARGER
EXCAVATION OF
VIOLENCE IN AMERICA
AND THE MALE
IMAGINATION.



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ABOUT GEORGE & CO.

George & Co is a Philadelphia-based company founded in 2011 by writer-director Anisa George as a platform for original performances that grow out of rigorous research and spontaneous play. It creates madcap and messy, ensemble-created works and has been nominated for “Best Ensemble” at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and named “Pick of the Philadelphia International Festival of Arts”. Its newest piece, HOLDEN, premiered at the Ice Factory Festival in New York City in the summer of 2015.

For more information go to www.georgeandco.org



THEATER

Review: ‘Holden’ Explores the Distance That Killing Requires

Ice Factory Festival 2015: Holden | Off Broadway, Comedy/Drama, Play | New Ohio Theatre, The, 154 Christopher St. | 212-675-6446

By **CLAUDIA LA ROCCO** AUG. 6, 2015

“Holden,” a new play written and directed by Anisa George, occupies a claustrophobic realm: a one-room cabin into which four intense men are crammed, bounded by slowly growing walls of chopped firewood.

But watching the play on Wednesday at the New Ohio Theater, during its premiere at the Ice Factory Festival, I was thinking about space. Specifically about the space conjured in these lines, written by the Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgaard, in his powerful and upsetting essay in *The New Yorker* in May, about the 2011 massacre of 77 people in his country:

“Killing another person requires a tremendous amount of distance, and the space that makes such distance possible has appeared in the midst of our culture. It has appeared among us, and it exists here, now.”

This unfathomable space, which has become a horrifying constant in American life, lies at the heart of “Holden,” a 95-minute work that — spoilers ensue — stays for a while in a comic, absurdist vein before throwing itself, and its audience, down the rabbit hole of male violence.

Chapman (Jaime Maseda), Hinckley (Scott Sheppard) and Zev (Matteo Scammell) share a woodshed of the mind with J. D. Salinger (Bill George, Ms. George's father). The first two character names refer to Mark David Chapman, who murdered John Lennon, and John Hinckley Jr., who tried to assassinate President Ronald Reagan. When he killed Lennon, Mr. Chapman had a copy of Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye," and that book was also found among Mr. Hinckley's possessions.

Zev's presence is ambiguous at first, until we learn that he is a more modern-day creature, obsessed not with the killing of one person, but of many. The promise of indiscriminate violence roils just below Mr. Scammell's physical portrayal of a lost, rage-filled boy, who is a bridge between Salinger's post-traumatic stress after World War II and the phenomenon of the gun-carrying murderer. (At one point, Zev offers a critique of the subject of Mr. Knausgaard's essay: "Even though the island was isolated, it was still way too open, way too many places to run and hide.")

Mr. Scammell is not alone in his compelling and charismatic performance. (The male cast is offset only by Adele Goldader, who plays Salinger's adolescent daughter, Peggy; Ms. George may have drawn from Ms. Salinger's memoir in creating a portrait of this reclusive writer.) The entire production is sturdily wrought, and if the many threads Ms. George ambitiously tries to weave don't always come together, they nonetheless hold you in a disturbing grip. The impossible conceit of her play is ultimately easier to swallow than the impossible actions with which she, and we, try to grapple.

"Holden" continues through Saturday at the New Ohio Theater, Manhattan; 888-596-1027, newohiotheatre.org.

A version of this review appears in print on August 7, 2015, on page C3 of the New York edition with the headline: What a Killer Requires.



Review: 'Holden' at New Ohio Theatre

by Deb Miller on January 7, 2017

The current remount of George & Co.'s critically-acclaimed Holden, first developed in New Ohio Theatre's 2015 Ice Factory Festival, is as relevant and unnerving now as it was then, in a country long plagued by a deadly combination of murder, mental illness, and all-too-easy access to guns. Written (in collaboration with the ensemble) and directed by Anisa George (the namesake and founder of the company), the intense tragicomedy interweaves fact and fiction, fantasy and absurdity, in its exploration of the psychopathy of violence, its consideration of the impact an artist can unwittingly have on an unknown impressionable public, and its socio-political commentary on the high price we pay for individual freedom.

Named after the disenfranchised antihero of J.D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, the atemporal conceit, set in a writing bunker surrounded by piles of chopped wood, brings together the troubled author (suffering from episodes of PTSD following his service in WWII) and his young daughter Peggy, with Mark David Chapman and John Hinckley (the infamous shooters of John Lennon and Ronald Reagan, who had copies of Salinger's controversial book in their possession at the time of their crimes), and the fictional Zev, who hasn't shot anyone yet but becomes increasingly intent on committing not just one killing, but on breaking the record for mass murder.

The imagined interactions of the emotionally immature and psychologically unstable males run the gamut from joking and taunting to fighting and bullying, as they try to cajole the stymied writer into finishing his next story — which, by implication, could inadvertently inspire more real-life violence. Dark comedy quickly descends into tragedy, with George and her gripping cast offering insights into the characters' disturbed minds, revealing the insane motivations for their acts (including songs by the Beatles and scenes from the film *Taxi Driver*), re-enacting the scenes of their horrific deeds, and exploding into unrestrained fits of anger and physicality. Through it all, Salinger's psyche is haunted by the guilt of what his words have engendered and concern for the future his daughter will inhabit.

Bill George is quiet and restrained as the tormented Salinger, caught in the nightmare propagated by the biggest fans of his book, and then comforting to his little girl, played by George Truman, after she awakens from a bad dream. Jaime Maseda is a bundle of macho hostility and hate-filled rage as Chapman, as he regularly flies off the handle, abuses his bunker-mates, and rants about his victim. Scott Sheppard brings the disarming quality of an overgrown mischievous boy to the oddly smiling Hinckley, and Matteo Scammell is chilling as Zev, transitioning from a scornful, mocking youth with no criminal history to a budding psycho-killer, readily embracing the violence that surrounds him and methodically planning his attack. Across the board, their characterizations are indelible.

The outstanding cast and direction are supported by an effective design, with alternating dark and bright lighting by Seth Reiser that shifts with the mood, and believable everyday costumes and props by Rebecca Kanach and Cem Ozdeniz. Nick Benacerraf's set captures the feel of an isolated bunker in the woods, and Alex Bechtel's sound skillfully balances the actors' dialogue with telling background music, the noise of household appliances, and the shots and explosions of wartime. Together with the disquieting script, they successfully evoke the quality of a discomfiting lucid dream.

In a week that has seen yet another mass shooting by a mentally-ill gunman at an airport in Florida, we should all take heed of the timely messages inherent in Holden, which are masterfully delivered by George & Co.



CATCH AS CATCH CAN: HOLDEN AT THE NEW OHIO THEATRE
by Jessica Rizzo | 9th Jan 2017 |

Reading J. D. Salinger's 1951 *The Catcher in the Rye* marks the moment in the lives of countless American teenagers when they first experience the uncanny, but existentially reassuring sensation of deeply identifying with a literary character. Freshly expelled from prep school, Holden Caulfield is staring down encroaching adulthood and doesn't like what he sees. At seventeen, he is a confirmed cynic. The world is full of "phonies" hiding their true depravity behind masks of smiling midcentury conformity, and he is the only one who can see it. Growing up means accepting at least some of the many distasteful compromises civilization requires, and to Holden the tradeoffs simply aren't worth it. He's a loner, a disillusioned idealist, a rebel without a cause, or an emotionally stunted sociopath-in-the-making depending on your point of view, which for first-time readers often depends on just how miserable high school is making you the year your English teacher assigns it.

The Catcher in the Rye's enormous success overwhelmed its author, turning Salinger into a recluse; he fled the spotlight in 1953 and spent the rest of his life on a remote compound in New Hampshire, continuing to write, but largely refusing to publish. Holden takes place in Salinger's bunker-like writing cabin on this compound, but in Anissa George's imagined version of the author's sanctuary, the solitary genius is not so solitary. When the play opens there are four men curled up asleep in this no-frills hideout, one on a folding cot, three on the floor, like refugees, or fugitives, or survivalists awaiting doomsday. One of bodies stirs and a young man slowly rises and creeps over to the writing desk in the middle of the room, where he begins copying out on a typewriter, word for word, the text of *The Catcher in the Rye*. He turns out to be John Hinckley, the man who attempted to assassinate President Ronald Reagan in order to attract the attention of Jodie Foster, on whom he'd become fixated after seeing her play a teenage prostitute in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. Bunking with him is Mark Chapman, who shot and killed John Lennon. What the two have in common is an obsession with *Catcher* (both men were found with copies of the novel on them after their homicidal exploits).

Salinger himself is in the cot, reliving his memories of WWII in nightmares. When day breaks, a familiar routine sets in. Salinger labors over his latest book, while his acolytes hover over his shoulders, goading him on, imploring him to get to an ending, and then to publish rather than locking yet another manuscript away in the safe. They help organize his chapter drafts. They also anticly help enact scenes from Salinger's wartime experiences. These surreal interludes, in which the killers function less as autonomous characters and more as symptoms of the author's PTSD, make the question of reality a slippery one in the play. Are these superfans here of their own free will? To sit at the feet of the master? Touch the hem of his garment? Salinger barely seems to notice that he has company. Only when he leaves the bunker, the door automatically locking behind him, do we learn that his groupies are also prisoners. But on some level, though he is the least voluble character by a wide measure, Holden is a monodrama for Salinger, a mental echo chamber in which the killings he was directly responsible for as a soldier mingle with the killings he might have been indirectly responsible for as a writer.

The fourth of Holden's strange bedfellows is a newcomer named Zev who doesn't fit the pattern. When questioned about his *Catcher* connection, he insouciantly admits that he "couldn't get into it" when they tried to make him read the book in school. Hinckley and Chapman's jaws drop; his apathy towards the sacred text is not something they can wrap their heads around. More offensive still is Zev's assessment of Holden: "No offense, guys, but he's kind of a loser, isn't he?"

Searching for some common ground, the assassins discover that, like them, Zev harbors murderous impulses. But he isn't interested in mulling over the who of a hypothetical massacre, only the how: "I don't like people," he says, "I like maps." Zev thinks in terms of logistics, entrances, and exits, how to trap as many people as possible in an enclosed space, like a theater. He thinks in terms of numbers, speaking approvingly of Anders Breivik, the Norwegian mass murderer who shot 69 Workers' Youth League summer camp participants in 2011. Zev admires Breivik not because he feels any ideological affinity with the right-wing Norwegian mass murderer, but because Breivik holds the world record for shooting deaths, and was shrewd enough to choose a small island for his ground zero, leaving nowhere for his victims to run. However delusional they were, Hinckley and Chapman took up arms for love, of an idea, of a woman, and they are appalled by Zev's cold logic. He has no real motive, but this makes him more terrifying, not less. When he escapes from the bunker at the end of the play, it seems like a foregone conclusion that we will soon be reading about his attempt to break Breivik's record.

Hours before I attended *Holden*, Esteban Santiago had retrieved a gun from his checked luggage and opened fire at the Fort Lauderdale airport, killing five people. Early reports revealed no specific rationale aside from a disappointing end to a military career and a history of mental illness. White supremacist Dylann Roof was in a Charleston courtroom, insisting that he felt no remorse for shooting nine African-Americans dead in a church in 2015. "I did what I thought would make the biggest wave," it had recently been made public that he wrote from jail, "and now the fate of our race is in the hands of my brothers who continue to live freely." Some mass murderers pledge allegiance to ISIS, like Omar Mateen, who killed 49 people at the Orlando gay nightclub Pulse in 2016. Some leave behind lengthy manifestos, like Elliot Rodger, who killed six in Isla Vista, California in 2014 because he was frustrated that none of the pretty blonde sorority girls would give him the sexual gratification he felt entitled to.

Aside from the fact that such attacks are almost always perpetrated by men not too much older than Holden Caulfield there is little they share but their rage and alienation. Many belong to the category German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger calls "radical losers," an appellation that Zev would likely find galling. Enzensberger writes that "because of the way humanity has organized itself—'capitalism,' 'competition,' 'empire,' 'globalization'—not only does the number of losers increase every day, but as in any large group, fragmentation soon sets in." Isolated young men who have suffered personal setbacks of one form or another sublimate their anger at the universe by conflating (not always incorrectly) their individual misery with perceived systemic injustices. When they make the leap to begin slaughtering people in the name of their coopted cause these radical losers become symbols, martyrs, heroes, rather than petty failures.

George declines to diagnose the Holden Caulfields of the world as "losers," radical or otherwise. Rather, her play asks us to consider the psychological contradictions American men must negotiate when born into a society that valorizes aggressive masculinity to the point where the

social ideal is itself anti-social. Combine this volatile situation with America's outrageously lax gun control laws and watch the bodies predictably pile up. Combine with Trump, alpha-male id personified, and permanently holing up in a bunker begins to appear an attractive lifestyle choice.

Midway through Holden, we learn that Hinckley, Chapman, and Zev all fancy themselves writers as well. We are treated to a sample of their prose and poetic stylings read aloud by their authors with trembling vulnerability and the painfully obvious need for recognition and affirmation. They are terrible writers. In this moment we see them not as killers but as young men, like Holden, struggling mightily with emotions they lack the language to express, with a loneliness they lack the tools to overcome. Unable to create, they turn to destruction to broadcast their pain to the world. Holden renders articulate what is too often wasted in mute violence.