

October 24, 2012

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

Edition: U.S. ▾



Arts & Culture · Painting Film Design Photography Theater Dance Architecture Female Artists Art Meets Science On Our Radar



Featuring fresh takes and real-time analysis from HuffPost's signature lineup of contributors

HOT ON THE BLOG

Chip Davis
James Franco

Tavis Smiley
Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm

HuffPost Social Reading



Michael Giltz
Freelance writer

GET UPDATES FROM MICHAEL GILTZ

Like 117

Disgraced Tries to Provoke But Only Puzzles

Posted: 10/23/2012 10:42 pm

React > [Amazing](#) [Inspiring](#) [Funny](#) [Scary](#) [Hot](#) [Crazy](#) [Important](#) [Weird](#)

Follow > [Video](#) , [Aasif Mandvi Disgraced](#) , [Ayad Akhtar](#) , [Aasif Mandvi](#) , [Disgraced Off Broadway](#) , [Heidi Armbruster](#) , [Omar Maskati](#) , [Arts News](#)

SHARE THIS STORY

0 2 0

0

Submit this story

DISGRACED LCT3 AT CLAIRE TOW THEATER

Disgraced hopes to be a provocative drama, the sort of entertainment that pushes a few buttons while portraying characters who have a veneer of civility but underneath embody the darkest urges of us all. Think Neil LaBute or Yasmina Reza.

While those two can excel at high concept but sometimes stumble on believable characters, playwright Ayad Akhtar has a promising talent for real characters but their disagreements are too polite and the hoped-for

shock when ugly prejudice is bared simply leaves us wondering if these are the same characters we've been watching for the past hour.

Aasif Mandvi of *The Daily Show* is solid as Amir Kapoor, an American lawyer of Pakistani origin who has allowed his bosses to believe he's Indian. One gives him a Hindu statue for a gift even though he was raised Muslim and is a strident non-believer. He lives on the Upper East Side with his beautiful wife Emily (a fine Heidi Armbruster) and the possibility of a partnership down the road.

Amir's nephew (an appealing Omar Maskati) wears a baseball cap and now goes by the name of "Abe" but the teenager's assimilation hasn't kept him from finding strength in Islam. He begs his uncle to represent a religious leader who has been accused (wrongly, the boy believes) of links to terrorism. Amir wants nothing to do with it; he paid a visit to the imam who spent their entire time together trying to get Amir to pray. But his nephew keeps insisting and Emily (a painter who has found intense inspiration in Persian art) adds her voice.

Reluctantly, unhappily, he becomes more involved. But not before the show's most convincing and memorable moment. Amir pins down his nephew into admitting that many of the adults in their circle disdain Western women and consider them whores for the way they dress. He tells Emily that his mother feels the same ("I thought she liked me," Emily murmurs) and then delivers the knock-out blow: a tale of childhood romance in which Amir had a crush on a Jewish girl in his class. When his mother discovers this, she angrily insists he never speak to the girl again; if he does, she'll break his bones. And so he'd

FOLLOW US

MOST POPULAR ON HUFFPOST

1 of 2

Murdock On Abortion: Pregnancy From Rape Is 'Something God Intended'

Recommend 93k

Was The Whole Donald Trump Announcement A Gigantic, Pointless Bust?

Like 10k

Coulter Uses Slur Against Obama

Like 40k

Another Day In Polls, Still Neck-And-Neck

Like 213

WATCH: Vivica A. Fox SLAMS Stacey Dash's Romney Endorsement

Like 1k

'Grey's Anatomy' Sneak Peek: Cristina's New 'Sex Friend,' Jackson's Lady Troubles & More

Like 5k

Allred Goes To Court Over Mitt Romney Divorce

never forget, his mother spat in Amir's face. At school the next day, he spat in the girl's face himself. That's the ugliness that Amir rejects, the narrow-mindedness he faced and wants no part of from his culture.

Amir doesn't mock his nephew for practicing. In fact, he gently mocks the kid for adopting such a Western name as "Abe" and refuses to use it. But he's a corporate lawyer and loves America and if Islam has no appeal to him, he has personal and intellectual reasons that resonate strongly and convincingly. Yet he *is* a lawyer and injustice is wrong, even for a religious leader he has no patience for. Amir is dragged back into the case.

That sets off a chain of events that include a quote from Amir in *The New York Times* where it might seem to readers that he and his law firm are representing the accused terrorist and ultimately a dinner party where Emily is going to discover if her Persian-inspired artwork will be accepted for a big show.

To this point, *Disgraced* has been a rather placid evening with modest disagreements expressed in the most polite of manners. It's when the playwright tries to push our buttons too readily that the show goes off the rails. It's easy to disguise a person's prejudice with social niceties and then reveal with coded words and increasingly brutal language the prejudice that simmers underneath.

Disgraced doesn't do that. Instead, our main character is set up quite believably as one sort of man shaped by his family and intellectual growth (not to mention the Western culture he lives in and fully embraces) only to have him do a 180 and prove to be the exact opposite of what he's been shown to be. Amir rejects his family's faith because of its anti-Semitism and backwardness towards women. Then suddenly we're told in fact he gets a warm feeling when world leaders discuss wiping Israel off the face of the earth and 9/11 was wrong (of course they brought up 9/11) but yeah, he felt a little pride that Muslims were fighting back. And if his wife cheats on him, why he's just a moment away from the Quran's imperative to beat her silly.

Similarly, the liberal-minded Jewish art dealer (Erik Jensen) is soon insisting that he knows why Muslims are called animals. The nephew reverts from an assimilated kid to an ascetic who dons traditional garb and hangs out with guys in Starbucks who tell people the West got what it deserved. And most confusingly and pointlessly of all, Emily's artistic breakthrough by drawing upon Persian imagery is rejected by Emily herself as naive. Huh?

This all explodes thanks to plot twists that pile onto each other in an especially awkward manner, each one less convincing than the last, or rather, less interesting. There's nothing unconvincing about marital infidelity or having a co-worker leap you on the corporate ladder. But none of it has any bearing on the weighty religious and cultural topics that *Disgraced* clumsily raises. It certainly isn't the fault of the cast, which is fine throughout, with Karen Pittman especially good as that co-worker of Amir's, probably because she's the most internally consistent character on the stage and isn't asked to suddenly turn into someone entirely different. Pittman also has an appealing warmth and intelligence.

It's only 90 minutes but *Disgraced* felt much longer. Perhaps when Akhtar listens to the vivid characters he can create rather than jumping them through hoops he'll deliver a longer play that feels shorter.

THE THEATER SEASON 2012-2013 (on a four star scale)

[As You Like it](#) (Shakespeare In The Park w Lily Rabe) ****

[Chimichangas And Zoloft](#) *

[Closer Than Ever](#) ***

[Cock](#) ** 1/2

[Harvey](#) with Jim Parsons *



Testimony
Recommend 1k



WATCH: U.N. Chief Dances Gangnam-Style
Recommend 784



Louisiana Woman May Have Set Herself On Fire In Dubious Race-Related Attack (UPDATED)
Recommend 32k


DON'T MISS HUFFPOST BLOGGERS 1 of 5




Chip Davis
[Halloween Is a Night Like No Other](#)



Tavis Smiley
[The Top 20 \(Cause 10 Ain't Enough\) Reasons \(Excuses\) Black Folk Will Give if Obama Loses](#)



American Horror Story, Season 2



Is The Neighbors Really TV's Worst New Show?

An Evil Dead Remake? Why?

[Slate Articles »](#)

MOST DISCUSSED RIGHT NOW 1 of 2




NSFW Exhibition Shows Naked Men For A Change




This Is NOT A Photograph

HOT ON FACEBOOK 1 of 3




Virginia Suburb Goes Gangnam Style




You Have NEVER Seen Face Painting Like This


Sponsored Links



New Policy in New York
2012-Drivers w/ no DUIs eligible for up to 50% off car insurance...
TheFinanceAuthority.com



"How Doctors Lose Weight"
New York Celebrity Doctor Reveals His #1 Trick To Lose Weight...
iConsumerKnowledge.org



Boost Testosterone Levels
Men over 40 are seeing shocking boosts in free testosterone with this

My Children! My Africa! ***
Once On This Island ***
Potted Potter *
Storefront Church ** 1/2
Title And Deed ***
Picture Incomplete (NYMF) **
Flambe Dreams (NYMF) **
Rio (NYMF) **
The Two Month Rule (NYMF) *
Trouble (NYMF) ** 1/2
Stealing Time (NYMF) **
Requiem For A Lost Girl (NYMF) ** 1/2
Re-Animator The Musical (NYMF) ***
Baby Case (NYMF) ** 1/2
How Deep Is The Ocean (NYMF) ** 1/2
Central Avenue Breakdown (NYMF) ***
Foreverman (NYMF) * 1/2
Swing State (NYMF) * 1/2
Stand Tall: A Rock Musical (NYMF) * 1/2
Living With Henry (NYMF) *
A Letter To Harvey Milk (NYMF) ** 1/2
The Last Smoker In America **
Gore Vidal's The Best Man (w new cast) ***
Into The Woods at Delacorte ** 1/2
Bring It On: The Musical **
Bullet For Adolf *
Summer Shorts Series B: Paul Rudnick, Neil LaBute, etc. **
Harrison, TX ***
Dark Hollow: An Appalachian "Woyzeck" (FringeNYC) * 1/2
Pink Milk (FringeNYC) * 1/2
Who Murdered Love (FringeNYC) no stars
Storytime With Mr. Buttermen (FringeNYC) **
#MormonInChief (FringeNYC) **
An Interrogation Primer (FringeNYC) ***
An Evening With Kirk Douglas (FringeNYC) *
Sheherizade (FringeNYC) **
The Great Pie Robbery (FringeNYC) ** 1/2
Independents (FringeNYC) *** 1/2
The Dick and The Rose (FringeNYC) **
Magdalen (FringeNYC) ***
Bombsheltered (FringeNYC) ** 1/2
Paper Plane (FringeNYC) ** 1/2
Rated M For Murder (FringeNYC) ** 1/2
Mallory/Valerie (FringeNYC) *
Non-Equity: The Musical! (FringeNYC) *
Blanche: The Bittersweet Life Of A Prairie Dame (FringeNYC) *** 1/2
City Of Shadows (FringeNYC) ***
Forbidden Broadway: Alive & Kicking ***
Salamander Starts Over (FringeNYC) ***
Pieces (FringeNYC) *
The Train Driver ***
Chaplin The Musical * 1/2
Detroit ** 1/2
Heartless at Signature **
Einstein On The Beach at BAM ****
Red-Handed Otter ** 1/2
Marry Me A Little **
An Enemy Of The People ** 1/2
The Old Man And The Old Moon *** 1/2
A Chorus Line at Papermill ***
Helen & Edgar ***
Grace * 1/2
Cyrano de Bergerac **
Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf? ***
Disgraced **

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of *Showbiz Sandbox*, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's available for free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his [website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called *Popsurfing* and also available for free on iTunes. Link to him on Netflix and [gain](#) access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

Note: Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that he will be

HUFFPOST'S BIG NEWS PAGES



MORE BIG NEWS PAGES »

Follow Michael Giltz on Twitter: www.twitter.com/michaelgiltz

FOLLOW ARTS

Like · 28k

GET ALERTS



New Policy in New York

2012-Drivers w/ no DUIs eligible for up to 50% off car insurance...
TheFinanceAuthority.com



"How Doctors Lose Weight"

New York Celebrity Doctor Reveals His #1 Trick To Lose Weight...
iConsumerKnowledge.org



Boost Testosterone Levels

Men over 40 are seeing shocking boosts in free testosterone with this
www.nugenix.com



Weird Loophole in New York

Long Island City - New trick helps drivers get car insurance for as low as \$9...
FinanceDigestToday.com

[Buy a link here](#)

[More in Arts...](#)

'Nude Men': Leopold Museum Gives Naked Men...

Halloween Light Show 2012: A 'Gangnam Style'...

Diego Fazio's Photorealistic Pencil Drawings: So Real...

Jason D'Aquino's Matchbook Drawings: Artist Creates Miniature...

Comments

0

Pending Comments 0

[View FAQ](#)

HuffPost Social News

To reply to a Comment: Click "Reply" at the bottom of the comment; after being approved your comment will appear directly underneath the comment you replied to.

[Preview Comment](#)

[Post Comment](#)

Share your Comment:

Post to Facebook.

Post to Blogger.

Post to Twitter.

Post to WordPress.

Post to TypePad.

Post to Tumblr.

View All

Recency | Popularity

[Advertise](#) | [Log In](#) | [Make HuffPost your Home Page](#) | [RSS](#) | [Careers](#) | [FAQ](#)

[User Agreement](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Comment Policy](#) | [About Us](#) | [About Our Ads](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Copyright © 2012 TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. | "The Huffington Post" is a registered trademark of TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. All rights reserved.

Part of AOL Lifestyle

