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Theater: Mike Birbiglia's Hapless Charm

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MIKE BIRBIGLIA'S MY GIRLFRIEND'S BOYFRIEND *** out of **** BARROW STREET THEATRE

Why hasn't some TV network/cable channel snapped up comic Mike Birbiglia for a sitcom? He's all over TV talk shows and radio's *This American Life*. He's got a bestselling collection of comic pieces. His last one-man show -- *Sleepwalk With Me* -- will be filmed as a movie this summer. Plus, Birbiglia has a mildly self-deprecating, Everyman appeal, a slightly skewed and self-aware perspective on life, a deceptively lazy low-key delivery and of course excellent comic timing. Heck, he's even got a catch phrase of sort -- an "I know" delivered

in varied tones of amusement and amazement.

Birbiglia's latest story/performance piece is much like *Sleepwalk With Me*. We get a rambling tale of his life, pierced with gentle observations and some hilarious comic set pieces all topped off with a bit of wisdom. This time, Bibiglia is dating a woman who says she always dates at least two men at a time, so one of them can't hurt her that badly (sort of like the heir and a spare system for British royalty). He knows he loves her but he's also sworn off marriage. "I never looked at my parents' marriage or really anyone who had been married more than 30 years and thought, 'I gotta get me some of that!'"

But when he's sideswiped by a drunk driver, Birbiglia has that flash of insight that maybe he does love

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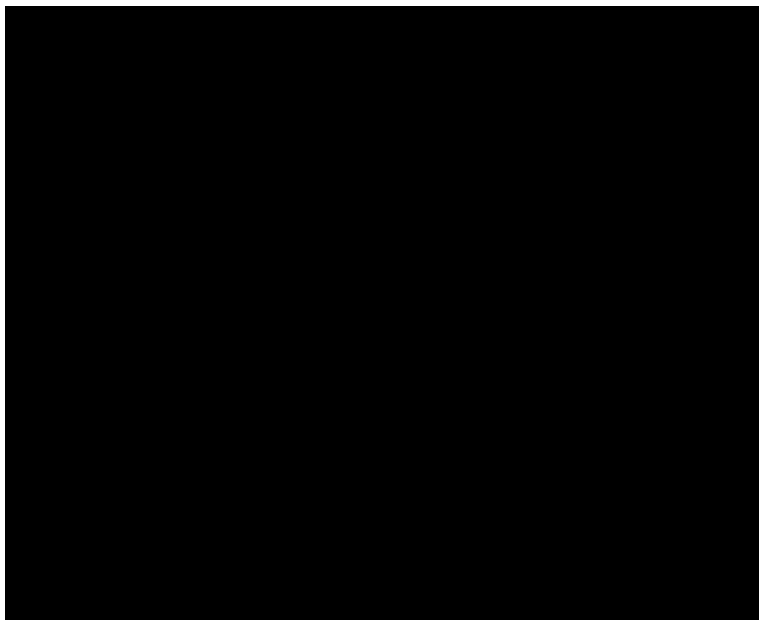
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her and want it all, no matter the risk.

On this frame, he hangs all sorts of amusing side-trips. The show begins with a stand-up's riff on cell phones and automated answering systems, the sort of thing you might hear anywhere. But the main show is Birbiglia telling stories from his life. He's not a master of voices and characters. You don't get the feeling that the stage is peopled with everyone from his world. Indeed, while he's empathetic to those around him, the defining point of view is always his own.

Here's audio of Birbiglia on *This American Life* telling the one of the stories that's in the show.



Even Jenny -- the girlfriend who has another boyfriend -- is a little fuzzy to me. When Birbiglia speaks as Jenny, he's quiet and calm and very reasonable, usually dropping a comment or declaration that resonates with our hero or blows his mind. Yes, he should be honest when he's kissed another woman (she, after all, is dating another guy). "But it doesn't mean I won't lose interest in you," she proffers. Or when they fight over bringing the proper ID to the airport (she doesn't bother and they always let her through, which makes me think this dating somehow took place pre-9-11 or how else could that be possible, even if the airlines do have a different standard for women, as he insists?) and they fight and fight and she insists he's wrong and he says if he's always so wrong, why is she with him? And she says, "You can't choose who you love." It's quiet and meant to be devastatingly meaningful to him. And the moment is sweet but the basic weakness that keeps this show being good rather than great is that while I know why Jenny might love Mike, I have no idea why he loves her or even what she's really like. Everything comes from his point of view.

But it's a witty, entertaining 90 minutes, with numerous memorable high points, like Mike throwing up on a date in high school at the local fair. Or getting his first kiss ages after he'd claimed he was already kissing girls a lot and so he couldn't celebrate with anyone. Or that horrific car crash which led him to



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spend months trying to correct a faulty accident report filed by the cop on the scene so that the drunk driver would be held responsible rather than Birbiglia. (The show's most frustrating twist is when he gives up and just pays for the other guy's car damage, rather than getting the police to correct the issue despite a massive, almost obsessive effort. Why? And why does the cop say "do the right thing" and just pay? isn't the right thing for the cop to do the right thing and correct his mistake? And for the drunk to learn his lesson, not get off easy?)

Those moments that frustrate you are a credit to Birbiglia's performance. You actually care what happens, you get caught up in his crusades, his fights with his girlfriend, his desperate desire to, you know, get by and have a little happiness. He ends on a sweetly hopeful note because that's the kind of guy he is and we know him well by now. And you can't help thinking that someday, when he captures the quirky charm of others as well as he captures his own, Birbiglia will create a show that's not just fun but genuinely great.

THE 2010-2011 THEATER SEASON (ratings on a four star system)

Angels in America revival at Signature *** out of ****

Arcadia with Billy Crudup *** 1/2

Bengal Tiger At The Baghdad Zoo **

Between Worlds/Entre Mundos * 1/2

Beautiful Burnout at St. Ann's Warehouse **

Blood From A Stone ** 1/2

The Broadway Musicals Of 1921 at Town Hall ***

Devil Boys From Beyond **

The Diary Of A Madman with Geoffrey Rush at BAM ***

Double Falsehood **

The Dream Of The Burning Boy ** 1/2

Driving Miss Daisy **

Elf *

Elling **

A Free Man Of Color ** 1/2

Gatz ***

Ghetto Klown ***

Good People with Frances McDormand **

The Grand Manner **

The Great Game ***

Gruesome Playground Injuries ***

The Hallway Trilogy: Nursing **

The Hallway Trilogy: Paraffin ***

The Hallway Trilogy: Rose ***

How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying ***

The Importance Of Being Earnest ** 1/2

The Interminable Suicide Of Gregory Church *** 1/2

John Gabriel Borkman * 1/2

La Bete ** 1/2

Les Miserables ***

Lombardi **

Macbeth with John Douglas Thompson **

The Merchant Of Venice *** 1/2

Middletown ***

Mike Birbiglia's My Girlfriend's Boyfriend ***

The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore *

Mistakes Were Made ** 1/2

Nixon In China *** 1/2

The New York Idea **

The Nightingale and Other Short Fables at BAM ***

Other Desert Cities **

Our Town with Helen Hunt ***

The Pee-wee Herman Show ***

The Road To Qatar *

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Small Craft Warnings zero stars

Three Sisters (w Maggie Gyllenhaal and Peter Sarsgaard) *** 1/2

Timon Of Athens at Public with Richard Thomas ***

The Whipping Man **

Wings **

Women On The Verge Of A Nervous Breakdown **

AT THE NEW YORK MUSICAL FESTIVAL

Blood Ties ***

Fellowship * 1/2

Fingers and Toes ** 1/2

Frog Kiss *** 1/2

The Great Unknown ** 1/2

Nighttime Traffic **

Our Country *

PopArt *

Shine! The Horatio Alger Musical ** 1/2

Show Choir **

Tess: The New Musical **

Trav'lin' ***

Without You *** 1/2

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 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 was provided with tickets to the show with the understanding that he would be writing a review.

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

The image shows a Bing search results page. At the top is the Bing logo and a search bar. Below the search bar are tabs for 'Web', 'Videos', and 'Images', with 'Images' selected. The search results display three items related to the movie 'My Girlfriend's Boyfriend': a poster featuring Mike Birbiglia, a Blu-ray/DVD box set, and a still from the film showing two men in a hallway. A 'SEE MORE IMAGES >>' link is visible at the bottom right of the results area.

The image shows a Twitter feed. At the top is the Twitter logo and a search bar. The feed contains two tweets. The first tweet is from user 'diba0101' (@Chris_Gorham) posted 35 minutes ago from a web browser, saying 'happy easter to you!! :) im ganna go watch my girlfriend's boyfriend. looking forward to watchin...you..teehee'. The second tweet is from user 'launce08' (@jamster03) posted 1 hour ago from a BlackBerry, saying 'juz finished watching My Girlfriend's Boyfriend... @jamster03 this is a #MustWatch'.

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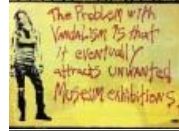
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