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## Theater: New Play *Cock* Not as Provocative as Title, Sad to Say

Posted: 05/17/2012 11:06 pm

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**COCK** \*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\*  
**THE DUKE ON 42ND STREET**

Do you want to see *Cock*? Did you like *Cock*? Is *Cock* worth paying for? If nothing else, the new play by Mike Bartlett (the acclaimed *Earthquakes in London*) provides some juvenile fun for theatergoers.

Unfortunately, the play is not nearly as provocative as its title, a title it never comes close to needing or earning.

The story is a flip on an old tale. Instead of a man leaving his wife for another man, it's about John (Cory Michael Smith), a gay man in a long-term relationship who suddenly finds himself attracted to a woman for the very first time. John can't decide who to choose (or even who he is, really -- gay, straight, bi, committed, philandering?) and it all climaxes in a very awkward dinner party. John's boyfriend (Jason Butler Harner) believes John is going to tell the woman that it's all over. Nonetheless, the boyfriend invites his father (Cotter Smith) to join them for moral support. The woman (Amanda Quaid) naturally believes John is going to end it with his partner and announce his love for her. John dithers and they realize he has absolutely no idea what he wants or needs. Neither do we and, unfortunately, Bartlett's play never makes us care very much either way

It's a smoothly entertaining piece nonetheless, with director James Macdonald handling the showdowns between actors quite nicely. The scenic and costume design is by Miriam Buether, who has built a circular boxing ring, with seating in the round on raised platforms that let the audience sit in judgement or perhaps cheer on their favorite protagonist at a sporting event. There are no props, with actors simply offering to take someone's coat or pour them a drink without actually bothering to do the deed. It keeps the focus squarely on the real action, the battle for John to figure out exactly what he wants.

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The constant squaring off works nicely, with a seduction scene being a real highlight. John and the woman circle each other while verbally working their way towards coitus in a bit of gamesmanship that is sexy and amusing at the same time. (It helps that Smith and Quaid have the best chemistry.)

So what goes wrong? First, Harner gives a mannered performance, with all his lines delivered in quotes. He's always quoting "dialogue" instead of just speaking. That alone throws the play out of whack. If we don't like the boyfriend, we can't feel a great amount of tension about whether or not they stay together. Plus, it soon becomes clear that John is not happy in their relationship. He claims, at least, that his boyfriend is patronizing and makes him feel small and not terribly bright. Maybe none of this is true; maybe he's just besotted with the new. But John's indecisiveness is unappealing and he makes their relationship seem poor. So maybe he's not bisexual and maybe he's just using this woman as an excuse to fantasize about a happier life but if we don't think the boyfriend is worth being with we can't feel terribly much is at stake.

Quaid gives the most convincing performance, though her big breakdown at the end doesn't quite deliver. Smith is better than his character, a frustrating fellow that doesn't know what he wants. Insecurity can be charming, at least that's what Albert Brooks wanted us to believe once upon a time. But indecision palls, even in a brisk 90 minute play. Smith does able supporting work as the loving and accepting father. It all deflates into a very unsatisfying resolution that leaves us pretty much where we started except for a would-be haunting last line that instead just annoys.

Then there's the title. If you introduce a gun in act one, by golly you better fire it off in act three. And if you call your play *Cock*, it better be a button-pushing bit of provocation that toys with gender and sexuality in ways both funny and shocking. We keep waiting, not unreasonably, for *Cock's* big moment, a soliloquy to sex, a panegyric to the penis, a colloquy on cock. And what do we get? Nothing. You walk out of the play without a clue as to why it's called what it's called.

I've heard good things about Bartlett and my discriminating guest says his play *Earthquakes In London* was much better. This comedy is certainly well-constructed and thanks to a generally fine cast (even the weakest performance isn't that bad) perfectly watchable. But when you show someone *Cock*, having them say "not bad" isn't just faint praise; it's positively deflating.

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

*Cock* \*\* 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](#) 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 writing a review.

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[fdavidm](#)  
140 Fans

08:53 AM on 05/21/2012

There's one thing this reviewer failed to mention about this theatrical experience. You have to sit on backless benches and cushions for the play which runs about 90 minutes with no intermission. I found that to be agony, given my bad back. People should be forewarned.

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freelance writer  
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12:16 PM on 05/24/2012

That's a good useful point to make. The theater does make a point of saying if you need/want a back to your seat that the "premium" seating is in the top row where people can lean back against a wall. I'm used to bleachers at Yankee Stadium so didn't actually think about it. Thanks for letting people know.



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**Francois G**  
81 Fans

08:17 AM on 05/21/2012  
Cocky...

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**viciousvirago**  
*Veritatum Dilexi*  
325 Fans

07:29 AM on 05/21/2012  
Actually that word came about to mean penis a long, long time ago. Words become acceptable, then non-acceptable thru the centuries. You cannot say that word now without someone blushing. People forget it's a rooster.

But leave it to Broadway to find a way to titilate the play-going crowd.

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**george martini**  
*I'm an engineer, cut me a break.*  
172 Fans

09:07 AM on 05/20/2012  
I was totally riveted. The actors verbally working their way towards coitus is something that has to be seen and not heard.

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**daringsugar**  
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02:40 PM on 05/19/2012  
Not as good an article as I anticipated lol.. The play don't sound that great either.

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**george martini**  
*I'm an engineer, cut me a break.*  
172 Fans

09:09 AM on 05/20/2012  
No it don't. Mayhaps you could find a gooder one yonder I reckon.

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**kinogod**  
*word farmer*  
560 Fans

01:41 PM on 05/19/2012  
According to HP, use this word and "you will be reported.". Hahahahahagagagagaga

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**Montcalms Revenge**  
*Plaines d' Abraham*  
421 Fans

11:39 AM on 05/18/2012  
What? No roosters? ;-)

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**HUFFPOST SUPER USER**  
**Dan Slander**  
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11:02 AM on 05/18/2012  
The play sounds like it sucks.

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