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‘Spin’ offers a fresh look at TV media politics

JOSH CABRIDO

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“If spin is a tilted version of the truth, and if every source of truth is tilted or spun, is truth absolute or subjective?”

This is the philosophical impetus for Jerrod Bogard’s “The Spin Cycle,” a collection of five politically conscious one-acts. The varied plots are strung together by prerecorded video segments of an O’Reilly-style newscast, from which this impressive, well-acted play takes its name, and are hosted by the fictional anchor Dan Dillinger (Justin Ness).

In between acts, audience members in the cozy Players Theatre fix their attention on the LCD screen that never leaves center stage, a testament to the omnipresence of the media. The regal demeanor of the modern broadcast anchor is perfectly captured by director-actor Ness, whose taped segments as Dillinger serve as soundbite-sized introductions to each subsequent act. And just like real TV, they prime the audience toward a certain interpretation of the scene that follows.

Take the first play, “Copper Green.” It is the simple story of a dad (Anthony Reimer) riding the Staten Island Ferry with his family and attempting to explain to his young son the significance of the Statue of Liberty. He draws on examples of immigrants from the Middle East to explain it. All the while, a well-dressed Arab man (Ivan Goris) silently sits on a bench reading a newspaper, expressionlessly fixing his tie and eavesdropping on the pair’s conversation.

There is a palpable tension — why is he there? Is this brooding Arab man plotting something sinister? But in the end, the man steps out of the way, the American family takes their tourist keepsake, and the lights dim without destruction. The fact that one was even suspicious of him is confirmed as the worst suspicion of all.

In “Just Your Average G.I. Joe,” an army veteran sitting in a bar after his second tour in Iraq receives a beer in honor for his service to our country. His response is a poignantly acted monologue by Bogard, speaking to audience members as if they were the crowded bar patrons; he tells us that we should have no sympathy for the so-called sacrifice American troops make during their tours in Iraq. It is just “[his] job”: He gets paid, and it’s one he enjoys doing, just like many other working Americans.

“Spin” isn’t just a fresh perspective on politics. Some of the plays tackle some of the more nuanced aspects of American life. “Hedge” deals with the culture of celebrity worship from the perspective of two sunbathing Beverly Hills nobodies halfheartedly swatting away paparazzi while waiting for a glimpse of their “friend” Penélope Cruz. And “First Base Coach” is a hilarious and heartwarming act about our fascination with childhood, baseball analogies and the opposite sex.

These are the sort of preconceptions that “The Spin Cycle” seeks to challenge. How much of our worldview, our culture and American life itself — ultimately, what it means to be an American — are shaped and influenced by the tilt of the news media? In the play’s final, powerful act, “Jerome via Satellite,” Dillinger steps off the screen and onto the stage, just in time for the producers to confirm our worst fears about our most trusted news sources: “That’s show biz!”

“The Spin Cycle” runs through Feb. 7 at The Players Theatre (115 MacDougal St.). Tickets (\$18) can be purchased at TheaterMania.com or by calling 212.352.3101.

Josh Cabrido is a contributing writer. E-mail him at theater@nyunews.com.