



The Time of Our Lies

Bianca's new play visually explores the pain and suffering of war, questioning our justification of human conflict.

Venue: Gilded Balloon (Venue 14)

'The Time of Our Lies' aims to move and educate, exploring the atrocities of war and asking a poignant question about the morality of modern warfare. The personal life of Howard Zinn, an American historian and social activist, creates the central narrative thread but the piece draws on the lives, struggles and deaths of many other soldiers of war. Writer, Bianca Bagatourian, expresses her desire to balance entertainment with didactic intent, using Butoh dance, puppets and multimedia to make this a strikingly visual play.

'The Time of our Lies' is about the historian and human rights activist Howard Zinn, apart from your personal connection with him what were your reasons for dramatizing his story?

"Besides his larger contribution to US history, through his book "A People's History of the United States" which challenges the conventional existing narrative, Howard Zinn had a huge influence on the psyche of oppressed and minority groups in the country. He was like a breath of fresh air, sweeping cobwebs away and making room for new dialogue, clarity and real critical thinking. This was hugely important to me as it helped me navigate through the fog of political jargon and general hazy milieu of "news" that dominated the airwaves when I arrived in America. Reading Zinn helped me understand and hold on to my sanity! His facility with words and direct way of addressing people serves a really important function for the maintenance of a healthy society. I want to help to spread both the importance of this "function" as well as that of his message by bringing them to as many audiences as possible. "

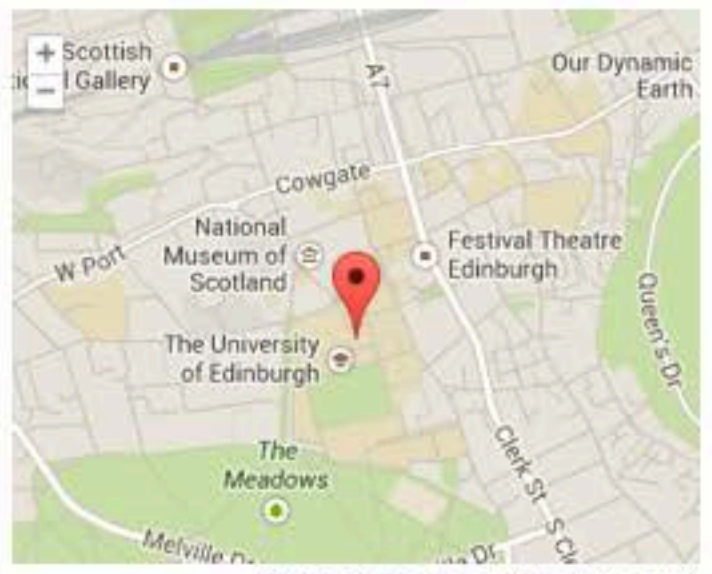
Your theatre is experimental and in 'The Time of Our Lies' you mix playful stylistic features, such as song, puppets and dance, with the serious discussion of war and its atrocities, what effect do you hope to achieve by doing this?

"No matter how strong the message, I am very clear about the fact that we are artists who entertain. In this show, we strive to achieve magical impossibilities that will impress the heart. Rather than through a narrow narrative plot, we create Proustian/Pavlovian moments where impact is so strong that it cannot help but cross into memory. We dramatize actions such as the removal of bullets from a shattered soldier through dance, song and poetic metaphor as the actors hold on to his collapsing torso, striving to celebrate the life of the soldier as he is dying and not just his death. "

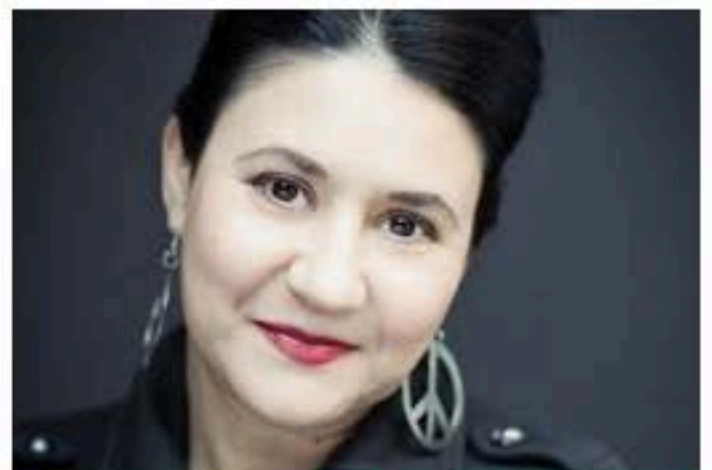
The title 'The Time of Our Lies' is memorable as it plays on the idiom 'the time of our lives', could you explain how you came up with it and what message it is intended to carry?

"Well, we live in the wealthiest nation in the world and yet we see homeless people on our streets everyday. We're groomed to think we help the world when we go to war and kill. As Zinn points out, every war we have ever gone to was based on a lie. We are surrounded by unrealities. This cognitive dissonance that exists in the zeitgeist of our society is what social psychologist Leon Festinger would say that, when experienced over a long period of time, can result in severe distress. It seems to me that our white picket fences have faded and our manicured lawns are wallowing in weeds. We're supposed to be having the time of our lives while we live in a time of despair. "

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Gilded Balloon (Venue 14)
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On your website you say that you, 'wanted to do a play that turned entertainment into news as so much news was entertainment', how, in 'The Time of our Lies' do you balance creating entertaining drama with your didactic intent?

"That's a great question. I knew that creating drama with the material at hand was the main challenge I was facing from when I began working with Howard and it was something I kept in mind throughout my writing journey. It felt a bit like I was designing as well as writing. I used a lot of song lyrics to relay information but knew that ultimately, much of the drama would have to be addressed in the staging process. For me, it was most important to have the right director, one with a delicate touch and also one who was very musical and I was fortunate to find just that in Josh Chambers. I knew a fabulous choreographer whom I had worked with before, Maureen Fleming, who specialized in Butoh dance, a dramatic form of Japanese dance created out of the anguish and terror of World War Two. And then the director brought together a group of fantastic actors who were so flexible and dedicated to the spirit of the piece. It just seemed that all the right elements came together and I started to see on stage exactly what I had in my mind's eye which I think is a rare and very special thing. "

Many of your plays, like 'The Time of Our Lies', center around the presentation of human rights issues, do you hope that your work has the power to educate your audience?

"Atrocities that go on in our world today happen on such large political scales. They seem untouchable. I don't understand concepts such as "Guantanamo Bay." My mind does not compute when I hear terms like "Waterboarding." These states of exception do not fit into my idea of humanity. Nor do the genocides and wars that still go on. I try to write about what horrifies me in the hope that others will come to share those horrors with me. If I am seeking for anything in my work, it is truths. If I am trying to break anything open, it is the moment. If I am looking to uncover things, they are lies. "

If there is one thing we should look forward to about 'The Time of our Lies' what is it?

"I would say the opening scene where we try to create a heartbreaking "spectacle" of a soldier dying for a very long time - something we don't usually come face to face with. Structurally, the play is loosely set in the form of Greek Tragedy and so this prologue sets the theme from the start. I wanted to take this moment and stretch it out, forcing audiences to just stay present with it. I guess we were also trying to allow the space on stage for people to experience the horror of death, but to do so in as beautiful a way as possible so they couldn't turn away. You can leave after that! "

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