

# US premiere of 'There is a War' gets lost in translation

By Alex Perri  
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Audiences at the Porter Center's Morrison Playhouse saw absurdism take to the stage this weekend, Feb. 9-12, with the US premiere of Tom Basden's "There is a War," a two-act farce about the attritional nature of war.

Themes of erosion, pointlessness, and hypocrisy were explored in the play, which was a part of the senior capstone project BC theatre majors collaborated to produce.

The play was marketed as a dark comedy, and in the play's program, director Brandon Smith described his first impressions of "There is a War" as "an amalgamation of absurdism, didacticism, and broad farce... a fast-paced romp."

I attended the show on its opening night, Feb. 9, and I found "There is a War" to be far from fast paced, and not quite a romp.

While certain BC actors stood out for their well delivered performances, the play as a whole successfully executed only a handful of jokes while fumbling through the rest of the absurdist material.

Elements of British humor were very apparent, and as one audience member noted in the cast and crew talk back after the Thursday night show, it was very "Monty Python-esque." A few well timed puns landed laughs from the audience, and the absurd situations the characters found themselves in were amusing enough. For a dark comedy though, the play was neither terribly dark, nor terribly comedic.

There seemed to be a clear effort to steer the production away from making a political statement about our government's current climate, in an attempt to make a more sweeping and obvious generalization that war is pointless.

The play features a main character Anne, a doctor desperately looking for the war, but only able to find some of its more obscure residues as she wanders aimlessly through the desert. Anne's

adventures are punctuated by a mystical blues performer from the sky, Andy Dog.

She runs into characters like the cynical chaplain, who also can't find any soldiers to save, and a band of San Pellegrino toting, hippie-journalists looking to simultaneously exploit and protest the war efforts.

The archetypal intent of the play to broadly apply to society as a whole was clear through the consistent vagueness. It is never stated why the two sides are at war, nor is it stated where or when the war takes place.

Any directions given to Anne along the way are stated as "the north," or "the front," or "that way" with a point of a finger to some unknown route in the distance.

The stage was set to resemble a giant sandbox with a sort of loading dock made of scaffolding built in the background. The sandbox went on to represent a desert, a hospital, and a host of

so many other locations, it is hard for this play reviewer to recall.

The first act is almost entirely forgettable. In the second act, the satire is more overt. It becomes apparent that the two sides fighting each other in the war are simply government puppets brainwashed by propaganda.

Anne finally finds the hospital she's been looking for, after the war has been declared over, yet the absurdist cycle continues when the doctors of the hospital are more interested in fighting people from "the other wing" than saving dying patients.

Compared to the previous dramas the BC Theatre has produced, the American premiere of "There is a War" did not exceed expectations. Among a few clever bright spots, the play seemed to lag behind its intended tempo with heavy handed jokes, and subtleties lost in translation on this side of the pond.



Photos courtesy of BC Media Relations

BC Theatre students performed the first showing of Tom Basden's, "There is a War" in the United States of America.