

Don't walk, run to FringeArts to catch *707 Hazardous Moves*, New Paradise Laboratories' latest (and dare I say, greatest) theatrical brainteaser.

Longtime festivalgoers are familiar with Whit MacLaughlin's particular brand of dark magic, but they've never seen him like this. Rather than casting his spell from behind the scenes, here MacLaughlin takes center stage, writing, directing, *and* starring in this pyrotechnic one-man extravaganza.

Not that the production goes heavy on scenic bells and whistles—what is remarkable about *707 Hazardous Moves* is how much MacLaughlin is able to do with so little. Inspired by an obscure French poem about chance, he tells us in his opening remarks, MacLaughlin came up for the idea for this show when he got to thinking about the many improbable coincidences of his own life.

And what a life! MacLaughlin regales us with riveting tales from an impossibly action-packed autobiography. Is he pulling one over on us? Can we believe everything he says? Does it matter? As a man of the theater, even MacLaughlin's stories about things that happened to him out in the "real" world have a certain stagey quality—my favorite anecdote concerned the time MacLaughlin got mugged on the way home from a rehearsal. His automatic reaction, he tells us, was to launch into a stage combat routine he had committed to muscle memory many years ago. The reflex might have been what saved his life. Or it might have been what caused the mugger to fire his gun, leaving MacLaughlin with a wounded foot, not unlike his theatrical forefather Oedipus, who also had pretty rotten luck when it came to coincidences.

In a bravura display of Acting (and I do mean Acting with a capital A), MacLaughlin conjures each episode of his life in finely-rendered detail, effortlessly shedding or shouldering years as the monologue meanders from his salad days to more recent events and back again. The stage is bare, but he transports us between locations with extraordinary precision. When it is meant to be a hot day, we can practically see the sweat rolling down MacLaughlin's brow. When it is cold, his teeth chatter. When he is meant to be ill, I swear his face turns green. At the performance I attended, when MacLaughlin opened his mouth in fear of something unseen, more than a few faint-hearted members of the audience let out audible gasps. MacLaughlin plays many versions of himself, but he also plays his wife, his daughters, his would-be murderer, the whole panoply of supporting characters in the drama of his existence. He executes these shifts so rigorously and yet with such a light touch that I suspect a cast of dozens could not come close to having the impact MacLaughlin achieves all by himself. It is truly a revelation of a performance.

But *707 Hazardous Moves* is more than a vehicle for an emotionally athletic performer at the top of his game—there is a deeper message here. By laying his own backstory bare as a series of close scrapes and near misses, MacLaughlin invites us to reconsider the narratives we have spun out of our own lives. We all like to think we have some control, that our choices propel us in a predictable direction, and that we deserve some credit for avoiding disaster thus far. Not so, MacLaughlin says. This modern-day Oedipus reminds us of that profound lesson the theater has been teaching us from the beginning—count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last.

Thom Weaver sheds light on the situation with an unobtrusive blue and white palette. Bhub Rainey's evocative score helps ground the action and connect the disparate dramatic episodes. Rohan Hejmadi's digital design artfully underscores the show's themes.

For years, New Paradise Laboratories has been dazzling Philadelphians with shows that are at once intensely cerebral and viscerally physical. *707 Hazardous Moves* carries the company into new, more literarily accomplished territory without sacrificing anything about what audiences have come to know and love about their work. Kudos to MacLaughlin and his entire team for continuing to take artistic risks and continuing to set the bar high. Tickets are going fast, so get yours today if you can. They'll be talking about this one for years.