

# *Cry Havoc!* Rages Onstage in a One-Man Autobiography of War

BY D. L. GROOVER

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Stephan Wolfert on stage in Houston.

Photo by Ashley Garrett

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**If there's a more visceral production in Houston right now than *Cry Havoc!* I'd like to know.** It chews you up and spits you out, as it were. It gives you chills while swathing you in empathy. Its horrific images of warfare are countered with angelic theatrical effects as the human heart is exposed. You haven't quite been to a place like this, yet it's homey and warmly embracing. A nightmare with raw nerves; it's a plea for understanding and healing.

Shakespeare as guide, psychologist, stark witness, and surgeon. Wolfert's personal narrative is threaded through the eyes of history's greatest observer. One man's tapestry transforms into the universal. Seamless, it's a neat piece of knitting.

There's no scenery, only Wolfert in black T-shirt, pants, and barefoot to set the stage. It's all we need. Christina Giannelli's aura-like lighting augments the mood, while Wolfert supplies the sound and the fury. We see and hear the train on which young Wolfert goes AWOL. We feel the rush through a tunnel as he lunges to the floor. We hear the whoomp-whoomp of a medevac helicopter as it flies off with his best friend wounded by friendly fire. Watch as his fingers, like an origami master, pulsate like copter blades or flash like strobes. His dysfunctional boyhood family comes alive – he calls them “the O'Neills” – with violent tugs on his T-shirt. In their battle over him, he's pulled one way, then another. When buddies are shot, they fall with haunting grace: a muffled explosion bursts over them, and Wolfert cradles their heads as they hit the ground, a grisly Pieta. He uses this image again and again, each time shorter and equally haunting and unforgettable.

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

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[Disney Presents The Lion King \(Touring\)](#)

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Sun., Jul. 30, 3:00pm

[The Bodyguard \(Touring\)](#)

Tue., Aug. 15, 7:30pm

He longs to be a dancer, but his big brother “beats the fag” out of him. When a high school accident leaves him paralyzed, his rehab takes him to the theater and *Richard III*, where Shakespeare's hunchback mirrors his inner life. The revelation sets his life course. But to escape Montana, he enlists in the army, and these memories flash forward and backward, intersect and intercut with a kind of Shakespearean structure.

As Wolfert states right at the beginning, this is a play “for and about veterans,” and there's message to his stage method. Taught to kill, the kids are

“wired for war, but unwired for society.” Upon their return, the insidious effects of PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) ravage their lives. Alcoholism and

interweaves his words about war and its effects with stunning precision and theatrical force. Along the way we learn about the wild Berzerkers, those fierce Norse warriors without armor who fought as if in a trance; Molly pitchers, women water carriers in the Revolutionary army who would oftentimes fight alongside their men; and William Henry Johnson, the forgotten army hero of WW I, awarded the Croix de Guerre from France for his bravery, but neglected upon his return to a segregated amnesiac America.

If modern military life is ill-suited to face the challenges of its own men, then the men themselves must help each other. It's this camaraderie, Wolfert implies, that can be a balm. And the second part of the play is an audience round table, where vets and families can tell their own stories. It's a safe space we all want to be in.

A member of Bedlam, the acclaimed theater company in New York City noted for its adventurous takes on classic plays (if you saw its dazzling *Saint Joan*, presented by 4th Wall Theatre last year with Wolfert in numerous roles, you saw the company at its best), Wolfert has been performing his solo piece for four years, touring the country as part of his De-Cruit program, which helps veterans reintegrate into society through the art of acting. Directed with an inventive no-holds-barred approach by Eric Tucker, Bedlam's artistic director, *Cry Havoc!* ("and let slip the dogs of war..." Marc Antony's reaction to the death of Caesar in *Julius Caesar*) is a magnificent, powerful first step. Let the healing begin.

*Cry Havoc!* continues at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays; 2:30 p.m. Saturdays and 3 p.m. Sundays. Through June 18. Spring Street Studios, 1824 Spring Street. For information, call 832-786-1849 or visit [4thwalltheatreco.com](http://4thwalltheatreco.com). \$29 to \$49, \$23 seniors, \$15 students and \$10 veterans with the code "Vet."

D.L. Groover has contributed to countless reputable publications including the *Houston Press* theater criticism has earned him a national award from the Association of Alternative News and three statewide Lone Star Press Awards for the same. He's co-author of the irreverent appreciation *the Opera Closet* (St. Martin's Press), now in its fourth printing.

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