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**BUT A WALKING SHADOW**

# Cry Havoc! Channels Shakespeare to Grapple With the Ravages of War

Stephan Wolfert uses the stage to discuss the thorny before and after of going to battle.

By [Doni Wilson](#) • 6/9/2017 at 3:37pm



Stephan Wolfert performs his autobiographic one-man play, *Cry Havoc!*

IMAGE: [ASHLEY GARRETT / 4TH WALL THEATRE COMPANY](#)

**FOR A LIMITED TIME**, Houston has a one-man show that makes you rethink everything about those who survive what Shakespeare calls “grim visaged war.”



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powerful language to translate life's most difficult issues.

From *Richard III*'s "Winter of our Discontent" monologue to the violence of *Macbeth*, Wolfert does what professors try every day with Shakespeare, which is to show how psychologically astute he was, and how completely and utterly relevant his words remain. How fortunate we are that Wolfert stumbled across a copy of *Richard III*, for that play led him to this project and its positive consequences.

We learn how soldiers are "wired for war," but never really "unwired," and how that affects them for the rest of their lives. The prospect of being "amputated" from the community hits hard, and the audience feels that the casualties of war are not just on the battlefield, but all around us when they get home.

Wolfert's physical movements are devastating and memorable, ranging from a desire to study ballet in an unsupportive household, to the violent movements of warfare, to the excruciating expressions of grief when losing a comrade in battle. None of this is easy, but all of it is real, and Wolfert had taken a unique kind of autobiography to a new level by taking it to the stage.

Black clothes and a minimalist set forces the audience to focus entirely on Wolfert: his story of growing up in a Catholic Midwestern family; his alcoholic father ("the kind of alcoholic father that Eugene O'Neill would be impressed with"); his demanding mother; and his brutal siblings. After suffering from a wrestling accident, he takes us on a journey from growing up to going AWOL. The sound effects for this production are his own from weapons, to running trains, to helicopters. It is stunning to watch.

But this is no act of mere self-indulgence. After leaving a career in the military for the stage and receiving an MFA at Trinity Repertory Company in Providence, Rhode Island, Wolfert has channeled much of his efforts into helping veterans, particularly those suffering from post traumatic stress disorder. Just as his show focuses on the endless "routine of paralysis and recovery" that haunts many veterans, his parallel program [De-cruit](#) is "designed to reintegrate military veterans using classical actor training." Not only did Wolfert create the one-man piece *Cry Havoc!* —he has performed it all over the country as part of De-cruit's mission.

Wolfert's acting skills are superb, but his writing should not be minimized. The hardest part of the show is watching how soldiers are trained to react in war—to experience the thrill of battle. But then they must also face tragic losses. After vividly describing the death of his best friend and the "disappearing strobe light" of his departure on an air medevac, he gives us a seamless entrance into Hamlet saying, "But break my heart for I must hold my tongue." The line serves as a moving reminder of how soldiers, whether through tradition or socialization (or even a psychological reaction) are silenced after experiencing the horrific elements of warfare. Even Wolfert's rendition of training and



And how “to stand” after war is what *Cry Havoc!* makes us think about, long after the show is over. From collateral damage, to veteran suicide, to the nature of massacres, to the big questions such as “What is honor?” Wolfert covers a lot of terrain and none of it feels gratuitous. The post-show discussion with the audience served as further confirmation that Wolfert hit a lot of nerves and touched a lot of hearts. Expertly executed, literary without pretension, and psychologically astute, the show is essential theater for anyone who is alive.

*Thru June 18. Tickets from \$15. 4th Wall Theatre Company, 1824 Spring St. 832-786-1849. More info at [4thwalltheatreco.com](http://4thwalltheatreco.com).*

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