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STAGE REVIEW

# A reckoning with the toll of war, on and off the battlefield, in Shakespeare & Company's 'Cry "Havoc!"'

By [Don Aucoin](#) | GLOBE STAFF AUGUST 08, 2016

LENOX — Powerful theater can ensue when an artist simply, or not so simply, decides to bear witness: This is what I saw, this is what I experienced, this is what I think it means, this is why you should care.

Stephan Wolfert commits himself body and soul to that mission in "Cry 'Havoc!,'" and the result is riveting.

The subject of Wolfert's raw and personal solo show, which he is now performing at Shakespeare & Company, is the psychological devastation of war, both on the battlefield and long after the soldier has left that battlefield.

It's a topic he knows firsthand as a former infantry officer and medic in the US Army and a veteran of the first Gulf War who struggled with sleeplessness and excessive drinking for years and one day found himself on the brink of suicide.



SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY

**Stephan Wolfert wrote and performs the solo show "Cry 'Havoc!'"**

“We were recruited at a psychologically malleable age, then we were wired for war, but at the end of our military services we were not un-wired from war,” says Wolfert. “We were not rewired for society.”

Being “wired for war” meant developing a deep camaraderie with your fellow soldiers, but it has also historically meant, Wolfert makes clear, dehumanizing the enemy in ways that have sometimes led to atrocities, such as the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War.

In a smart touch that immeasurably deepens and enlarges “Cry ‘Havoc!,’” Wolfert enlists Shakespeare as a kind of coauthor. Interspersed among his own personal reminiscences and observations are well-chosen excerpts, passionately delivered by Wolfert, from “Henry V,” “Richard III,” “Titus Andronicus,” “Julius Caesar,” and “Coriolanus.” Virtually no corner of human experience was beyond the reach of Shakespeare’s imagination, and he was never more penetrating than on the subject of war. So when Wolfert describes or reenacts an episode of battle or trauma from the recent past, and then suddenly unleashes a burst of Shakespeare written more than four centuries ago, the effect is to bathe the episode in a searing, almost blinding light.

It was the experience of seeing “Richard III” in a Montana theater that inspired Wolfert to leave the military and embark on a career as an actor, director, and

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where he serves as director of veteran outreach and is a cast member in Bedlam’s acclaimed off-Broadway production of “Sense and Sensibility.” Bedlam’s artistic director, Eric Tucker, is at the helm of “Cry ‘Havoc!’” (Tucker recently directed and performed in the troupe’s alternating versions of “Twelfth Night” at Cambridge’s Central Square Theater, presented by Nora Theatre Company.)

Wolfert delivers a dynamic and physically expressive performance in “Cry ‘Havoc!’,” remaining in constant movement while attired in a dark T-shirt and jeans. Though his subject could scarcely be more grim, Wolfert periodically breaks the fourth wall to banter with the audience, an approach that undeniably builds a certain rapport but risks dissipating the spell he is working so hard to cast.

He emphasizes the timeless universality of the soldier’s experience, dwelling at length on the story of an African-American infantryman during World War I named Henry Lincoln Johnson, who overcame nearly impossible odds to save a comrade from the Germans, suffering two dozen wounds in the process. What haunts Wolfert — he choked up at the performance I saw, and in that moment did not appear to be acting — is imagining Johnson’s struggles after the soldier returned home. He notes Johnson died homeless and penniless, drinking himself to death by the age of 33.

Wolfert has his own harrowing tales to tell, including an account of holding in his arms a mortally wounded friend who had been struck in the face by a round of ammunition. Almost as wrenching is his story of an episode from only a decade ago that illustrated how much psychological fallout Wolfert was still coping with. Yet while he lays himself bare in “Cry ‘Havoc!’ ” Wolfert also makes demands on the audience. In particular, he forces us to think about our responsibility to and for the countless vets who were “wired for war” but are now back home, struggling day-to-day, sometimes behind closed doors but often in plain sight, before the eyes of a society that claims to honor their service.

## **CRY ‘HAVOC!’**

Play by Stephen Wolfert Directed by Eric Tucker Presented by Shakespeare &

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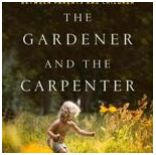


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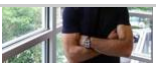
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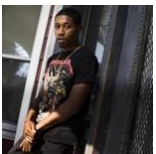
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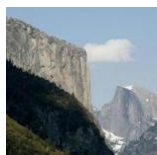
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## Nigerian superstar King Sunny Adé returns with his big band, juju intact

A defining African star whose renown spanned the globe during the 1980s, King Sunny Adé continues to pursue his career and develop his sound. [MORE...](#)

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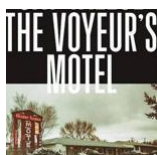


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“Hollywood Medium” revolves around the work of Tyler Henry, a clairvoyant who goes for the emotional jugular. [MORE...](#)

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## ‘Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner’ speaks to a new era

The play is still set in 1967, yet actor Malcolm-Jamal Warner is convinced the Huntington production remains relevant today. [MORE...](#)

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James Taylor’s creativity flows anew





Taylor's first album of original songs in 13 years will be released next week.

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Listening to the jokes on this show is like getting slapped across the cheeks repeatedly with a rubber ducky. [MORE...](#)



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## In 'Suicide Squad,' DC Comics reaches for the dark side

Will Smith, Margot Robbie, and Viola Davis are standouts in a movie that is like "The Dirty Dozen" with added superpowers. [MORE...](#)



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## Russian Grand Ballet's modest 'Swan Lake'

The performance of "Swan Lake" given by Russian Grand Ballet at the Strand Theatre on Saturday offered a chance to see a company from the Tchaikovsky/Petipa classic's home country in an intimate setting, and at prices lower than what you'd pay to see the Boston Ballet at the Opera House. [MORE...](#)

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## Dr. Steven Hatch investigates the spectrum of certainty

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In "Snowball in a Blizzard," Hatch explores several questions for which definitive answers in medicine are not available. [MORE...](#)



## John Oliver begs you to pay for your news

Oliver gave an impassioned defense of journalism Sunday night on his HBO series "Last Week Tonight." [MORE...](#)

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Though star Nick Offerman shines, Huntington Theatre Company's premiere adds up to less than the sum of its entertaining parts. [MORE...](#)

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People do evil and don't enjoy themselves in this doleful adaptation of the Shakespeare tragedy. [MORE...](#)

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Jennifer Garner stars in a film that recounts a based-on-fact tale of faith and medicine. [MORE...](#)

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Alexandre Tharaud, who performs with the Orchestre National de France at Symphony Hall, talks about playing after tragedy. [MORE...](#)

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MUSIC REVIEW

## Rapper Vince Staples rejects hype in sold-out show

Rapper Vince Staples, who has vaulted to the forefront of contemporary hip-hop in just a few short years, ignored hype in a commanding Middle East show. [MORE...](#)

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## Picasso was wrong. Your child is not an artist.

The art of children has its charms, but it does not follow that every random squiggle and blob is a work of untutored genius. [MORE...](#)

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## 'My Brother's Bomber' a labor of love and loss

Ken Dornstein confronts the people who are suspected of blowing up Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. [MORE...](#)

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## After 40 years, T.T. the Bear's calls it a night

One of the area's most beloved music clubs will open its doors for the last time tonight. [MORE...](#)

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Maria Sol Escobar, known to everyone as Marisol, was famous in the 1960s and then forgotten. Now appreciation is rising again. [MORE...](#)

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entirety of otherwise has yet to be determined. [MORE...](#)

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## Bryan Cranston puts the swagger in 'Trumbo'

Cranston plays Dalton Trumbo, who was as big a legend in the film industry as he was in his own mind. [MORE...](#)

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Often in the arts, it all comes down to timing and mood, to some mysterious combination of the piece itself and where you are in your life. [MORE...](#)

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There were many more than just three Stooges. [MORE...](#)

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## So how did a hot fall book get published a month early? Ask Oprah and the Times.

In a surprise announcement, Winfrey announced that “The Underground Railroad” would be her pick for the next Oprah’s Book Club. [MORE...](#)



## Behind the Scene: ‘The Draft’

Director Diego Arciniegas solved many problems at once with his idea to cover portable garment racks with fabric. [MORE...](#)



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## A lovely time warp at Jacob’s Pillow, ‘MONUMENT’ project revisits dance history

Adam H. Weinert presents a program that is a rare treat, featuring reconstructions of dance pioneer Ted Shawn’s choreography. [MORE...](#)



MOVIE REVIEW

## ‘A War’ is one of the best war movies ever

Not only is Danish director Tobias Lindholm’s tense, tragic saga the best film about the war in Afghanistan, it’s one of the best war movies, period. [MORE...](#)

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On his show Thursday night, Meyers poked fun at local accents and everyone’s obsession with them. [MORE...](#)



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Three decades after they epitomized early hip-hop's party-funk aesthetic, Erick Sermon and Parrish Smith are keeping busy on an anniversary tour. [MORE...](#)

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Tom O'Brien's film "Fairhaven," set in the town by that name near New Bedford, opens Friday in Somerville. [MORE...](#)

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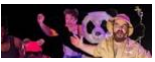
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