



Theatre in a **VAN!**

Press kit

2010

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Theatre in a VAN!

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Mission Statement

Theatre in a VAN! is a new theatrical initiative to produce work in vehicles parked on the streets of New York City. We actively seek to engage a more diverse audience and cultivate a greater interest in theatre by, keeping our tickets low, appealing to a modern cultural sensibility, and literally taking theatre to the people on the street.





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History and Overview

The project was started and created by theatre artist Leon Pease. The project was born out of Leon's frustration with the high prices of rehearsal and performance space in the city. He felt that the expense was incredibly discouraging to young and upcoming theatre artists. While struggling with this problem he happened to be sitting in his boss's car when he thought to himself,

"You know, it's kind of spacious in here. I wonder if you could do theatre in a van?"

About a month later, Theatre in a VAN! opened their premier performance of Bertolt Brecht's *The Elephant Calf* in his girlfriend's, parents SUV. Only a few weeks after the opening of their first show, the Greenpoint Gazette contacted Leon asking for an interview. It was then Leon knew that he was really on to something. The company later went on to purchase and paint their own short bus, which for the moment, acts as their primary performance space.

To date Theatre in a VAN! has produced four 10-20 minute plays including a new adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *The Elephant Calf* and three original musicals. In September, Theatre in a VAN! began working with Impetuous Theatre Group and more collaborations between the two companies are on the way.

Theatre in a VAN! is more than just a new theatre company, it's a new way of performing, producing and watching theatre. Theatre in a VAN! creates an incredibly intimate performance venue requiring little to no projection on the part of its actors. This allows the actors to adopt an almost film-like approach to acting, which has proven popular with both performers and audience members. As Theatre in a VAN! is the current owner of its Theatre (A short bus), there are currently no costs associated with rehearsal or performance space. This allows the company to produce quality shows at a fraction of the cost of most other theatre companies, and in turn helps them keep ticket prices low. Also, shows produced by the company enjoy the benefits of a wider diversity amongst their audience members by engaging people on the street.

Theatre in a VAN! is many things but there is certainly not much out like it. It is a new and exciting take on theatre that seeks to stimulate new perspectives on the art form. Theatre in a VAN! maybe on a roll, but they're not going anywhere.



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The 5 Commandments of the Van!

Theatre in a VAN! is not content with the state of independent theatre in New York City. We feel that it is too expensive, too dated, and too out of touch with modern culture. We strive with every production to find ways of fixing these problems by adhering to the 5 commandments of the Van.

1. We shall charge 5 dollars a ticket. We believe that to compete with the film and music industry we must offer theatre at competitive prices. That is why Theatre in a Van will never cost more than a movie, and one of the reasons, we believe, it has been more successful with a wider range of people.
2. We shall not perform... Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekov, Strindberg, Moliere, Tennessee Williams or Thornton Wilder, unless we are making fun of them. Plays by these authors are overdone (and usually badly). The obsession with producing these works over and over again is almost as bad as Hollywood's insistence to re-hash old movie and television franchises. It is a practice that I believe pushes theatre farther and farther into antiquity and obscurity.
3. Thou shall break the fourth wall. It is long been held that theatre will suffer because film can do more. I ask all theatre artists to instead hold that there are things that theatre can do, that film cannot. Examples of these include engaging the audience as an active participant instead of as a passive viewer, incorporating live music, re-inventing the conventions of a performance space, and breaking the fourth wall.
4. We shall not be experimental for the sake of being experimental. We will never decide to produce a period piece and then thrust it into a different time period for no reason. We will not invent backwards forms of storytelling only to confound the narrative for the sake of attempting to be abstract. We will only make choices that suit the play, and that includes setting them in a van in the first place.
5. Thou shall not hold theatre sacred. We believe one of the reasons theatre doesn't resonate with a wider audience is the pompous air that seems to spew out of most theatre people. We won't ask you to turn off your cell phones. You don't have to dress up. You don't have to be sober. You don't have to be nice to the actors.



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Production history

The Elephant Calf

May 15th– July 1st

2010

Originally included in Brecht's play Man equals Man, the Elephant Calf is about making theatre under the worst possible conditions. This play within a play pits the performers against botched lines, a shoddy script and an audience full of heckling soldiers. A new 20 minute adaptation by Theatre in a VAN!

Directed by Leon Pease

Staring Sarah Todes, Christopher Devlin, and Hunter Canning

Video (and other?) by Sarah Victoria Semlear

Backdrop by Benjamin Ayers

Produced in a Mini SUV.

The Big Spill

June 18th– July 3rd

2010

A 15-minute acoustic musical about how to solve the BP oil spill.

This epic operetta tells the story of Leon and Dave. Two musician/inventors who believe they have found a way to fix the gulf disaster. Audience members are asked to don the persona of BP employees and listen to their proposal. Its a wild 15 minutes of music and comedy with a "choose your own adventure" style ending.

Directed by Sarah Semlear

Staring Leon Pease and Dave Strumfeld

Script, Lyrics and some Music by Leon Pease

Music by Dave Strumfeld,

Produced in an Mini SUV.



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THE SUB-ATOMIC SOLUTION

Sept 9- Sept 26

2010

Leon and Dave, two musicians/scientists attempt to help president Obama put an end to all conflict in the middle east. With the help of their first rate interns (the audience), the team conducts research, has a space party, and ultimately decides the fate of humanity with a choose your own adventure style ending. With zombies, Moontopians, and love guns, The Sub-Atomic solution is an experience you won't soon forget.

Book & Lyrics by Edward Leon Pease IV

Music by Dave Strumfeld

Directed by Sarah Semlear

With Edward Leon Pease IV & Dave Strumfeld

Produced in the Theatre in a VAN! bus.

GILGORD: KING OF THE MOONTOPIANS

Sept 9- Sept 26

2010

Gilgord: King of the Moontopians, journeys to earth to decide whether the human race is worth sparing from sexual enslavement. With the help of his minstrel Larry, Gilgord forces a young earthling to convince him that humanity doesn't suck. In the end it's to audience to decide the fate of the world with the blast of a single Nerf gun.

Book & Lyrics by Edward Leon Pease IV

Music by Adam Cohen

Directed by James David Jackson

With Edward Leon Pease IV & Adam Cohen

Produced in the Theatre in a VAN! Bus



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Our Article in the Greenpoint Gazette

Here is a link to the article online,

<http://www.greenpointnews.com/news/theatre-in-a-van-takes-it-to-the-street>

Theatre in a Van Takes It to the Street

Jun 28, 2010

by James Yeh

Vans along Bedford Avenue are home to many things: gourmet ice cream, fish tacos, cupcakes, secondhand books and records, pot stickers, schwarma. And now, from 8:30-11pm every Thursday night until July 1st: theatre. For the modest price of \$5, interested theatre-goers can purchase entry into the back of a gray minivan parked along Bedford and North 6th Street to witness a 20-minute adaptation of German playwright Bertolt Brecht's "The Elephant Calf."

Fittingly, "The Elephant Calf" is a comic play about making theatre under the worst possible conditions. Full of asides, heckling, intentionally botched lines and other elements of metatheatre, "The Elephant Calf" is a play within a play performed by three actors—Sarah Todes, 24; Chris Devlin, 23; and Hunter Canning, 25—a few hand puppets and minimalist props. The performances vary in range and pitch, from Canning's disruptively aggressive Soldier, to Devlin's wistful Pal Jacky the Elephant Calf, to Todes's turn as a sultry, bombastic Banana Tree.

The project is the brainchild of theatre artist Leon Pease, 23. "It's basically an answer to how expensive rehearsal space is," Pease explained last Thursday night, as he handed out promotional flyers to Williamsburg passersby. "It's also a way to bring theatre to people who don't normally experience it. It's also about making it vibrant again." Pease is optimistic but also realistic about theatre's

current status in the American cultural milieu. “Most young people when they think of art, they think of music, sometimes visual art. But theatre’s not really on their radar. It’s like, ‘How do you make it cool again?’”

Making theatre cool again is a daunting task. And while Pease admits it may never have the cache of say, an illegal underground rock show in some industrial space in Bushwick, you can’t fault him and his company for trying. They’ve taken their act—and van—to a variety of unconventional spots for theatre: Washington Square Park, in front of the arch; Times Square; the Lower East Side; and now Williamsburg.

As far as attracting walk-in attendees, Bedford Avenue has been the best. “I think people come here to experience something left of center,” said Pease, who was born in Baltimore and now lives in the Lower East Side. “Here, this is still, the frontier of where artists are. I think that, really, it’s been pushed out further. But I think there’s still stuff happening here.”

Responses from passersby to Theatre in a Van on Thursday night were as varied as they were unpredictable. Some scoffed. Others gave curious looks or smiled politely or condescendingly. One guy stopped to ask Pease a litany of financial questions as his girlfriend filmed the play with her cell phone. Still others ignored the company altogether, hurrying down the street toward whatever place they needed to go at 10pm. But the more adventurous passersby usually stopped to see what was going on. One of these curious attendees was Andy Field, an actor and theatre critic on holiday from England. “The sales pitch won me,” he said. “‘Want to come see theatre in a van?’ There’s a weird disjunction between the refinement of theatre and the spectacular crudity of a van. I like it.” “I was fascinated by the girl with the banana,” explained Katrien Van Couillie, of the Netherlands, another curious attendee. Some of the interactions were simply kind of odd. “What?” asked one guy with a ponytail and wearing a bowler hat, tweed blazer and snakeskin boots. “Is this like Bang Bus?”

Besides working to draw the hard-earned attention of New Yorkers, that particularly indifferent and unimpressed breed of pedestrian, Pease and company have faced other challenges as well. A large part of their costs have gone to paying parking tickets. “When we were still trying to figure out the parking

situation, we parked the car in front of a fire hydrant,” said Pease. “But it was a trash day, so the fire hydrant was covered in trash. We left it [the car] there for a few days and when we came back, there were three tickets for the same thing. There’s also been some resistance from people who are theatre people,” said Pease, who supports himself by performing puppet shows for children at a non-profit in Hoboken. “There have been friends of mine who are like, ‘Oh, you’re not doing it in a theatre?’ And we’re like, ‘No, we’re doing it in a van.’ And they’re like, ‘Oh.’ It’s either they get it or they don’t.”

Theatre, according to Pease, has always been an art form slow to evolve. “It’s like in art, visual art especially,” he said. “There’s always that guy who vomits on a canvas. And that guy is whatever that guy is. But he plays a very important role in the spectrum of what the visual art world is. Theatre, I feel like, has huge holes. It’s not as complete. There’s the people who do Shakespeare a million, million times, flog Shakespeare to death. Then you’ve got the musicals, that are way, way, way commercial. And then you have the indie theatre scene, which is way, way, way not commercial. In theatre, there’s not as much challenging of convention. There are people who think they’re doing something really weird, but still everyone comes in, gets their programs, lights go down. It’s like, come on. That’s how I feel, anyway.”

Looking ahead to the future of vehicle-as-stage theatre, Pease is hopeful, optimistic. “You know how there’s Curry Row? I really hope, in a couple years down the road, maybe there will be a street just lined with cars, where people are doing plays, different companies. There’s no reason why not. It works, it does. It’s just a challenge of getting it out there. I know in my gut, once we get a little attention, it’s going to happen.”



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Biographies of Current Staff

Leon Pease

Founder and Director

Leon Pease is the founder and director of Theatre in a VAN!. He attended the Baltimore School for the Arts as an acting major, then went on to graduate from the SUNY Purchase acting conservatory with a BFA in acting, class of 2009. Leon is an avid theatre maker who writes, sings, acts and directs. His goal with Theatre in a VAN! is to bring theatre to an untraditional audience. Leon directed and produced Theatre in a VAN!'s premier production of Bertolt Brecht's *The Elephant Calf*. He also wrote and starred in the Theatre in a VAN! performances of *The Big Spill*, *The Sub-atomic Solution*, and *Gilgord: King of the Moontopians*. Leon hopes to act and direct more in the coming years and maintains that theatre is a powerful and distinctive art form, even in this modern age.

James David Jackson

Producer and Managing Director

is a founding member of Impetuous Theater Group & Managing Director of Theatre in a VAN!. As producer, he has worked on *Office Sonata*, *Fenway*, *Chronological Secrets of Tim*, *Swim Shorts 3*, *12th Night of the Living Dead*, *The Vigil & Hack* for ITG; *Sub-Atomic & Gilgord* for TiaV! *Open All Night*, *Rebel Verses*, *U.S-ification of America Conference*, *Victim* in NYC. He has directed *Venezuela & A Night Near The Sun* for ITG; *Solo Man Watusi & After Loss* for Downtown Urban Theater Festival; selections of *Tenn 99 &* assisted *Sweet Storm* for Labyrinth Theater Company. David is a co-creator of ITG's annual *47:59 Play Festival* and is a freelance producer, director and graphic designer.

Sarah Victoria Semlear

Producer, Director and Writer

Sarah Victoria Semlear is primarily a video editor and experimental video artist who dabbles in the world of theatre. Sarah graduated from SUNY Purchase with a BFA in filmmaking in 2010. She directed both *The Big Spill* and *The Sub-atomic Solution* and wrote the script for *The September Tapes*, all Theatre in a VAN! Productions. Sarah also works as an assistant editor and encoder for both *The Daily Show* and the *Colbert Report*, at Comedy Central. She is excited about the future of Theatre in a VAN!



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Benjamin Ayers
Scenic Designer and Visual Artist

Ben was born and raised in Cooperstown NY. He attended Purchase College where he acquired his BFA. He can be found residing in Brooklyn NY, where he works and lives. Ben designed and painted the set used in Theatre in a VAN!'s production of *The Elephant Calf*.



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Links

Check us out at,

www.theatreinavan.com

Also check out our You Tube channel at,

www.youtube.com/user/TheatreinAVAN?feature=mhum

and we're also on Facebook!

Check out our friends Impetuous Theatre Group at,

<http://www.impetuous theater.org>

See our article online at,

<http://www.greenpointnews.com/news/theatre-in-a-van-takes-it-to-the-street>



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Production Stills: The Elephant Calf





The Big Spill





The Subatomic Soustion and Gilgord: King of the Moontopians





BYE!