

Q&A with Nick Jones about his play, TREVOR

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Artists Rep: What inspired you to write TREVOR?

Nick Jones: I was instantly obsessed with the story of Travis the Chimp, who mauled his owner's friend in 2009. I was fascinated with the details that came out, of Sandra and Trevor's life before the tragedy, more than I was interested in the horrible event itself. Here was a woman who had lost both her daughter and husband, and seemed to have nothing left but an overgrown animal...an animal she would eventually be forced to kill. That combined with the bizarre details: the show biz past, enjoying wine together out of long-stemmed glasses, reports of Travis being allowed to drive the car.....I knew I wanted to write about all of this immediately, but I wasn't sure what tone or structure the play would take. It took a few years of gestation before I actually sat down to write it.

AR: Do you have life experiences of your own that fed into any of the characters or conflicts?

NJ: Although I wasn't really aware at the time, I think I can look at the play now and say I was relating deeply to what Trevor goes through on an artistic level, of having been fluffed up to have huge expectations for himself – being promised the world – and slowly realizing that none of that will ever come to pass. For whatever reason (and I choose only to note this honestly, and not dwell on it), I really connect to stories of artistic mediocrities. I love Amadeus, but I'm on Team Salieri. Also, *Cutie and the Boxer*, a documentary about a struggling Japanese artist in New York...really hit me hard. I found myself suddenly weeping. Trevor is in line with those stories, except for him the dream is even more unattainable, because it's something promised to another species, a club to which he will never, ever belong.

AR: It seems the play is also a commentary on parenting (of humans, too). To what extent was that intentional?

NJ: It's as much about a mother-son relationship as an animal-human one, because Trevor is Sandra's animal as well as her baby. In fact, she sees him as more human than chimp. I suppose that works metaphorically for the way a lot of people see their children. They can't see what's wrong or even dangerous about them because they never stop seeing them at their most vulnerable and loving, and that vision, as well as their unconditional love, gets in the way of any objective assessment.

AR: What do you think is the most challenging aspect of this play for audiences?

NJ: Knowing something really bad is going to happen, and then seeing it happen.

AR: In the play, only the audience fully hears what Trevor is thinking and what the human characters are saying – while the characters don't understand what each other are saying – what are you trying to say with this incongruent communication about listening and hearing?

NJ: We're all in different plays. We take cues from each other, but we never really fully know what's going on in another person's head. That's why when we do get close – when we feel intimately understood – it's so powerful. But there will always be a gulf. And within that potential for misunderstanding, and confusion, you also find your comedy, and your tragedy.

AR: Did you write TREVOR as a metaphor for something beyond the story presented?

NJ: All the things we've already discussed. I mean, I didn't sit down to write the play as a metaphor or allegory. But the conceit encourages a metaphorical reading, and the good thing about metaphors is that they can suggest multiple interpretations at once. It doesn't really make sense on a naturalistic level. I can't truly show you what's going on in an animal's mind, because I don't know, and it's foolish to think it could be fully expressed with only a human vocabulary. I am fully aware there is a contradiction, in that we're showing an actor playing a chimp saying “you'll never know what animals are really thinking, but here is what they *probably* are thinking.” It's definitely not reportage. So please, if you could interpret it metaphorically, that would be great.

AR: This play has been produced a few times. How have the productions differed from each other, and did those differences inform you in any way about your play?

NJ: I haven't been able to be involved in all the productions, but I was intimately involved in the New York premiere and the Los Angeles production. There is a lot of room for physical comedy and characterization, particularly from the actor playing Trevor. Actors tend to geek out early on studying primate behavior, then settle into something subtle. It works best that way. All you really need to do is find a few physical signifiers to remind us that the character is not human. We need to know that Trevor is dangerous, but it's not because he's waving his hand over his head. It's because he's frustrated, deeply, and because we are told that he is incredibly strong. That compresses the spring for the end of the play, when things actually do get incredibly physical. In a bad way.