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Triple Noir

by RL Nesvet

The Shadow-Pier reviewed July 24, 2007

In the cult 1950s noir film *The Shadow-Pier*, socialist-leaning World War II veteran Johnny, his African-American best buddy Justin, and sweetheart Corinne battle the forces of evil, as personified by Ocean City, Md., property developer Mr. Bamardine. All their fates will be decided on the salted boards of Ocean City's creepy Shadow Pier, which is also the name of Bamardine's sleazy resort.

This film became a cult obsession because it was shown only once—and only partially—before one Agent Spencer, of J. Edgar Hoover's FBI, arrived to shut it down for promoting Communism—or "racial harmony." Like another 1950s classic, *Rebel Without a Cause*, *The Shadow-Pier* achieved notoriety as a "cursed" film, because all of its actors died early, unnatural deaths.

The major difference between *Rebel* and *The Shadow-Pier* is that the latter was never made, except in Jonathan Wallace's brilliant new play, also titled *The Shadow-Pier*. A winner of Abingdon Theater Company's prestigious Christopher Brian Wolk Award, the play is being premiered by the Howling Moon Cab Company as part of the Midtown International Theater Festival.



Peter Reznikoff and Gayle Robbins
Photo Credit: Ellis Gaskel

Wallace's play consists of three interwoven narratives—that of the fictional film; its creators' battles with McCarthyism, as personified by Agent Spencer; and a modern standoff involving the film's ghostwriter (the last living member of the creative team), a modern film scholar desperate for tenure, and an insane former FBI agent who builds bombs in his basement and claims to have a unique, extant copy of the film.

What will Johnny do to get Corinne back from the vicious Bamardine? What will actor Ed Hudgins (who played Justin), film financier Eliane Tenbroek, and cinema owner Sam Stein do to keep themselves off the blacklist? What will film scholar Moira Spelling risk for job security? And can haunted ghostwriter Ferry Tenbroek prevent the curse of *The Shadow-Pier* from claiming any more lives?

Wallace's script explores each of these questions with an equally riveting dose of suspense. He adroitly exploits the fragmentation of the three narratives to increase the tension. James Duff's stylized, minimalist direction highlights the noir atmosphere with tableaux that look as if they came from 50-year-old reels.



Peter Reznikoff and Gayle Robbins
Photo Credit: Ellis Gaskel

THE SHADOW-PIER

Jewel Box Space

Category: Drama
Written by: Jonathan Wallace
Directed by: James E. Duff
Produced by: Howling Moon Cab Company
Opened: July 16, 2007
Closed: August 5, 2007
Running Time: 2 hours

Theater: Jewel Box Space
Address: 312 W. 36th Street, 4th floor
New York, NY 10018
[Yahoo! Maps Directions](#)

[Click for Theater Listing](#)

BOX OFFICE

Tickets: \$18.00
\$15 for students/seniors

CREDITS

Creative Team
Written by: Jonathan Wallace
Directed by: James Duff
Produced by: Howling Moon Cab Company/Midtown International Theatre Festival
Light Designer: Alex Moore
Sound Designer: Julio C. Pena
Set Designer: Elisha Schaefer
Costume Designer: Melanie Swersey
Light Choreographer: Adam Souza

Cast
Jared Morgenstern as

The Shadow-Pier is complicated, but it isn't a mess, structurally speaking. Wallace has supplied a clear protagonist in Ferry (Peter Reznikoff), who, when contacted by the film scholar and the psychopath (Jared Morgenstern), fights his instinct to leave the cursed film safely submerged in his memory. Forced to recall the dark days of the 1950s and the lessons in the film itself, he constantly calculates his risks, just as any film noir hero does.



Peter Reznikoff
Photo Credit: Ellis Gaskell

Reznikoff's Ferry is a haunted but ordinary old man. His pain and grief are detectable but never exploited for melodrama. All four actors play one role in each of the three narratives, and they switch between their roles with creative versatility and great clarity. In particular, Reznikoff's handling of the switches between the reserved patrician Ferry, the energetic first-generation-American Stein, and a cardboard-nasty Bamardine is impressive.

As the scholar Moira, Ferry's alcoholic, film-financing cousin Eliane Tenbroek, and film heroine Corinne, Gayle Robbins shows an intensity reminiscent of Katharine Hepburn. At the same time, the contrast between her self-assured, put-together Moira and her scatty, sloppy Eliane is huge.

The costumes, like the actors, do triple duty. Melanie Swersey's black, white, and gray outfits lend the film-within-a-play scenes a good deal of noir verité. Minor changes, such as the addition of plastic glasses or removal of the men's hats, change the era and the character instantaneously. The set, by Elisha Schaefer, remains the same: the wooden pier dominates the film scenes and, like its namesake movie, haunts the worlds of its creators in the 1950s and their 21st-century survivors.

It is not often that one sees a play that takes genuine aesthetic and structural risks while having something real and vital to say. *The Shadow-Pier*, like the film within it, is a masterpiece waiting to be dredged up and shown to the world. Brave the curse and go see it.

Agent Spencer, Johnny, and Cory
Paul Pryce as Ed, Justin, and Agent Taylor
Peter Reznikoff as Sam, Mr. Bamardine, and Ferry Tenbroek
Gayle Robbins as Eliane Tenbroek, Corinne, and Moira

Crew
Associate Producer:
Elisha Abatsis
Board Op/PSM: Mariel Matsos