

EVERYBODY'S GOT ONE

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Detained



Photo by Jenny Graham

Fountain Theatre

We have come to know over the years that no theatre complex in LA has been as staunchly dedicated to social relevance and fighting for equality and justice than the Fountain. It is the quintessential place to champion the world premiere of France-Luce Benson's *Detained*, a work commissioned by ACLU immigration attorney Judy Rabinovitz and created from interviews with real undocumented residents being held in U.S. detention facilities facing possible deportation.

On Sarah Krainin's starkly minimalist and industrial-looking set, eight incredible committed actors sweep us up into the lives of these traumatized people and their equally traumatized families, transporting us into the bowels of these deplorable centers. We hear personal stories of the many mistreated individuals whose lives have been uprooted by a system made more heartless and deaf to human need than ever before in our already embarrassing history during the administration of Donald Trump, a time that made immigration reform in our country more impossible than it already was.

Speaking directly to the audience, we meet decent, hard-working people from Haiti, Guatemala, Eritrea, Colombia, and Guinea, one a feisty 30-year resident of New York City (Liana Arauz) who has raised her family by working as a roofer, another a U.S. veteran (Will Dixon) held in detention over three years who tells us we would never believe how many fellow vets he met while incarcerated at the center.

The ensemble, which also features Camila Ascencio, Jan Munroe, Theodore Perkins, Marlo Su and Michael Uribes, are all perfectly cast and equally remarkable in their ability to work together as a cohesive whole, anchored by Christine Avila as an underpaid immigration attorney, surely based on Rabinovitz, fighting desperately to help free these shockingly ignored and voiceless people whose stories we would otherwise never hear.

The glue that binds this all together is the exceptional staging by director Mark Valdez, whose ability to keep these eight actors moving with purpose and fluidity in such a restrictive space is quite extraordinary.

In a week where the rapidly changing dynamics of social media has exposed and bombarded us with real-time images of horrific abuse of power never seen before in our modern history, perhaps *Detained* audiences could be a tad desensitized to the plight of these individuals at this moment in time, having recently been smacked in the face with so much pain and suffering from across the globe.

It would still be nearly impossible to remain unmoved by Benson and Rabinovitz's absorbing living docudrama, but for future incarnations of this highly worthy and moving play, perhaps it would be better to simply tell the dehumanizing tales so urgently needing be shared without the audience made to feel as though we are among those individuals who don't care.

It's that preaching to the choir thing: If we brave the outside world and show up at the Fountain to take in the message clearly detailed from the name of the play alone, not to mention any public elucidation of the storyline, we obviously already care. *Detained*, for me, worked best when I didn't feel accused of indifference by eight accusing pairs of eyes standing a few feet from where I sat, no matter how eloquent their plea might be.

**THROUGH APR. 10: Fountain Theatre, 5060 Fountain Av., LA.
323.663.1525 or fountaintheatre.com**
