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Interview with Scott Casper, Artistic Director of taxdeductible theatre

By Byrne Harrison



Scott Casper is a playwright, actor and Artistic Director of taxdeductible theatre. Through *The Dare Project* (an evening of ten minute plays, written on a dare), he has written, directed or performed in every one of the company's 20 NY installments of the event to date, which has created nearly 100 world premiere plays since 2006. His full-length play *#hero* had its world premiere in February and runs through Saturday, March 9th.

Tell me a little about the genesis of *#hero*.

#hero originated out of our recurring series of ten minute plays, *The Dare Project*. Since 2006, we have produced 21 of these events and created nearly 100 short plays in the process. The plays are written on a dare: a raw idea given to us by our community, which we use as the foundation to develop the plays on the page and in the rehearsal hall.

Building on what we learned, we started our first full-length project with a dare as well:

“We fight about the little things, so we can ignore the big things.”

Over a year and a half, we developed that idea in the rehearsal hall, incorporating the voice of every member of our company. We also put the work in front of our community, showing parts of the work as it progressed at each *Dare Project*—and adding their feedback into the story at every chance.

The process engaged all of our voices from the inception of the idea all the way through to production. The collaborative evolution of the piece ensured that while every word of the play was *written* by me, through all of our effort, it has been *authored* by taxdeductible theatre.

What is *#hero* about?



Robert Larkin

Photo by Nicholas Alexiy Moran

#hero follows NYPD Officer Norman Burrows and his wife Grace. After Norman saves a woman who falls on the subway tracks, he becomes a social media sensation. As his public profile grows, their private life unravels, until the hero must expose his own myth.

With the play, I'm trying to ask: have we lost touch with ourselves in a hyper-connected world? Do our public acts define our private lives? It's easy to connect with everyone; but is it worth it to connect with anyone?

Celebrity culture has always been around, but it seems to have gone to extremes for the last decade of so. What do you see as the dangers of this?

It's not the celebrity culture itself, as much as the exponential rate of expansion of the connected culture that I find most alarming. And that sounds counterintuitive.

The democratization of fame *seems* like it is a good thing. The technology allows us to find ways to participate in the culture ourselves, to engage more fully with one another as we celebrate "REALITY" more than anything else. But that attention amounts to empty calories. You may feel good while you consume them ("Gee, those Crab Fisherman really do have a hard way to make a living," "Those *COPS* are really doing us all a service by incarcerating that shirtless fellow," etc.), and it allows you think on both sides of the equation (the viewer and the performer) that we're all gaining a deeper understanding of one another. But it's a myth. And since it is so easy, and since the content is so pervasive and so prevalent (in our pockets and purses), it feels like the myth is the way it's *supposed* to be. Social media allows us an opportunity to be closer in a distant world, right?



L. to R. Wendy Bagger,
Robert Larkin, Bryn Boice
Photo by Michael Poignand

So, your actual friendships get supplanted for your Facebook "friendships," and your conversations lose nuance and compromise as they need to be limited to 140 characters, and the end goal of being feels like it should be amassing as many hits as you can, without recognizing the isolation that each one of those clicks represents.

So what message do you want the audience of *#hero* to take home with them after the show?

The real conflict is that after the show, I'd like the audience to plug in, log on and tweet, and post, and share, and like everything about *#hero* to pitch the play to as wide an audience as they can to make the promotion of the play viral. But, after they hit send, and do us all the favor of incorporating our idea into a broader world? I hope there's an appreciation of the problem of the easily interconnected world. You can't put the genie back in the bottle, and I don't think anyone really wants to. And yet. Are we better off? If we get a few more tickets sold, I won't complain, necessarily.

Tell me a little bit about taxdeductible theatre. How long have you been working together?

The company has been around and producing since 2005. We started first by pursuing readings of plays that had fallen through the cracks in the NY theatre scene, but quickly discovered that we were most passionate about developing new plays. Primarily, we have pursued this goal through our ten-minute play series, *The Dare Project*, world premiere plays written on a dare. It's a laboratory for collaborative artists to develop a play from the raw idea all the way through a finished production.

We are dedicated to developing the uniquely theatrical expression of our community and our collaborative artists. We create new plays that celebrate the theatrical event of sharing space with our audience and we honor their impact on the work well before they enter the lobby and well after the final curtain.

And that's really the mission of the company. We share new voices. We create memorable experiences. We challenge ourselves and our community to follow one basic rule: demand bold theatre

Do you have any more full-length shows that are being developed out of *The Dare Project*?

Right now, the working plan is to take the lessons we've learned on development from *#hero*, and apply them to a new project. As it stands now, the company has a blank page staring at us, waiting for it to be filled in with a new idea, which is both terrifying and invigorating. The joy of developing with taxdeductible theatre is that it allows us all to push our boundaries of creativity while holding one another accountable for the work. As we approach the close of this production, we have every confidence that we can once again succeed by going back to square-zero. That confidence doesn't replace the fear of the blank page, though. On the other hand, the people within the company, and the prospect of working together in a rehearsal hall, makes us all eager to fill the first page, so we can get to second one and beyond.

What else is coming up for taxdeductible theatre?

The next project which we do know about will be our twenty-second installment of *The Dare Project*. It's going to be a big one for us, as it will be our first effort following the success of *#hero*, it will allow us all to refocus on new ideas to propel us forward, and it will mark our one hundredth world premiere ten minute play. We're still working on securing dates, but the tentative plan is to hold *The Dare Project* #22 sometime in the late spring/early summer to close out our season in style. Stay tuned for more details!



L. to R. Allyson Briggs, Wendy Bagger, Robert Larkin, Christopher Sutton, Alex Pappas, Bryn Boice Photo by Nicholas Alexiy Moran

#hero runs through March 9
Wed-Sat at 8pm
Sundays at 2PM

At the Chain Theatre
21-28 45th Road, LIC

For more information and tickets, please visit: www.taxdeductibletheatre.org