

CRITIC'S CARNIVAL

By Steven Bergman

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Character: Sam Beaulieu – fiftyish. Dressed very “Film Noir.”

Pronunciation notes:

Beaulieu is pronounced – “Bow'-lee-oh”

Vela should be pronounced – “Vee'-lah”

Set:

A folding chair at a metal folding table. In the middle of the table is a radio microphone. Papers are on the desk. Lights are dim for mood.

SAM

This is Sam Beaulieu with my latest show review. The play is called *Critic's Carnival*. As tonight is closing night, I felt that I would take the liberty of commenting on the plot of the piece, since by the time you read this, the run will be over. The show is a *tour de force* accompanied by selected featured roles.

The play opened showing us the lead at age seven, attending a production of *Death of a Salesman* with his uncle. He proceeded to relive that evening in vivid detail, sitting there dumbfounded from their second balcony seats for three hours, not realizing that Willy Loman would become as much of his vocabulary as GI Joe and Superman. From then on his fate was decided – or so he thought. He would be ... an actor.

He remembered how he would pretend to put on shows any time he could. Usually one-person shows, as his neighborhood was not made up of many kids interested in the theatre. Lots of football, lots of hockey, no theatre. So his productions seldom reached their target audience. From tales of exciting superhero adventures and suspenseful wartime conflicts, to dramatic stories of veterans who came home from the war only to find out that their girls had run off

with other guys, his tales would only be applauded by his ancient relatives at whichever selected holiday gathering they picked to visit him and his parents. Taking into account the hearing aid ratio of the audience, he could not qualify his plays as successes.

The play moved forward to his high school years, where our leading man finally reaped some dividends from his love of the theatre. "Ah, to be a boy in the theatre! What a way to meet girls!" he tells us. His school was small, so it didn't matter how good an actor he really was: he would be guaranteed a lead role (except when the director decided to do *Steel Magnolias*, of course) He could spend an entire term with a bunch of girls who instantly recognized him as dateable. The only disadvantage to this system was that he was never able to recognize where his abilities fell on the "talent meter." The teacher would never offer a criticism, because for him to chance losing a boy from the drama program would be catastrophic, especially a good looking, humble young man who could play straight.

So our boy continued through high school, gaining confidence in his acting every week and succeeding with the ladies as well. When he was cast in a lead role, his leading lady would become the target of his affection for the next 8-10 weeks. Always, his chances of the proverbial "score" were in his favor as drama students, like their distant cousins in the chorus or the band, traveled in packs and seldom strayed from the herd.

The next scene, however, depicted an unfortunate turn as, even though our protagonist had earned an academic scholarship to State U., it became obvious in his first term that the drama teacher of his high school had set him up for a fall: his acting abilities were far below those of his new peers. The ladies wanted nothing to do with him. Desperate and heartbroken, he came to the realization that he could not abandon the art that had given him the most self-esteem in his entire life. So instead of performing on the stage, he began to watch the stage. He told us how he never thought much of journalism, preferring his own pretend world of acting to any occurrences in the real world. But he soon figured out that by writing what he saw, what he sensed, and what he felt of the performance on stage, he

experienced the same enthusiasm from his chair in the audience. "The best of both worlds!" he yelled.

So he began a new path. He discovered the school newspaper and wrote about every theatrical happening he could find on his campus. Soon his territory expanded off campus to the local theatres and finally to the crowning achievement at the local level – the sacred world of road tours.

From watching that first production of *Death of a Salesman* with his uncle, to first class touring productions of Shakespeare, he had finally found his element. He became well respected in town for true and realistic criticisms of the theatre that passed within the city lines. His literary praises began to sell tickets and define hit shows, while his pans would keep a promising New York-bound production from realizing its goal.

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