

One-man show for all of 'US'

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An assortment of students and staff of all different shapes, sizes and sexualities huddled together on a rainy Wednesday night last week under the passionate and provocative umbrella of Tim Miller's one-man show, *US*. The black stage of the Merrick Theater was stark under the soft pink lights, its sole decorations a microphone and a large flag of Broadway cast album covers. Faint disco music blended into the excited hum of the audience as it awaited the opening of the highly-anticipated performance.

"I embrace the gay stereotype," Miller proclaimed early on. Miller is anything but typical. The works of the internationally acclaimed writer and performance artist focus on Miller's own exploration of his homosexuality. *US* addresses the deeply intermingled political and personal aspects of growing up and living as a homosexual in the United States.

The show's premise was political exile. Miller explained he would soon be leaving the United States with Alistair, his Australian partner of 11 years, once Alistair's visa expires. Miller, dressed simply in a black tank top and shorts, amused the audience with a running commentary as he packed a suitcase "for exile." His jokes about the homoerotic Broadway cast albums and pornographic National Geographic magazines in his luggage had the audience roaring with laughter, but a hush suddenly descended when Miller pulled out an American flag. "What about this?" he mused aloud. "Do you take the flag of America with you when you are being forced out by how unjust it is?"

US powerfully combined Miller's funny, provocative stories of his childhood love affairs with his passionate denunciation of the

injustice inherent in what he saw as a homophobic American system. Miller filled the tightly-packed theater with high energy as he recounted his childhood love affair with Canada; the audience shrieked with laughter as Miller recreated the British accent he'd affected after seeing Oliver at the age of nine. He joked with the audience as he dropped a trail of Broadway cast albums like stepping stones across the stage and spoke of the meaning they had in his youth. Yet, even amid the jokes, Miller recalled his childhood desire to find his place in the world, and his feeling even at a tender age that it wasn't in the United States.

A masterful storyteller, Miller deftly wove his current political issues into the colorful fabric of his life. Though many of his recollections were told humorously, Miller was passionately serious about his message. Often, he'd seamlessly steer the still-chuckling audience to more serious topics. "What's wrong with us [Alistair and me]?" Miller suddenly asked plaintively, as the bouncy show tunes fell silent in the background. "We're nice guys." Although he quickly added jokingly, "we recycle," the weight of the question wasn't lost.

The spiritual and artistic aspects of the show were highly appreciated by the liberal audience, and the political message was heartily received. However, Miller's symbolic use of the American flag, already a tired political symbol, sometimes came dangerously close to being overwrought. And when Miller stripped naked during a powerful monologue, his nudity seemed to distract audience members from the message, rather than illuminate it. Fortunately, Miller's evident passion for the subject pulled the powerful show together, and it was his sheer energy that drove the message home.

"That's all this show is about tonight: voice," Miller said. For a piece as complex as US, a performance embodying art, love, politics and the conflicted emotions of a soon-to-be-expatriate, such a simplifying statement proved surprisingly true. Tim Miller's story, the culmination of funny, painful and beautiful life experiences, was given a powerful voice in US that few members of the audience will soon forget.