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THEATER REVIEW | 'SURRENDER'

# Shoulder Arms and Imagine Soldiering

By ANDY WEBSTER  
Published: November 5, 2008

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rigors of basic training and combat, in a simple, make-believe way. In Act I most audience members don fatigues and Army boots before listening to a drill instructor, Jason Christopher Hartley — a longtime National Guardsman and blogger and, with Josh Fox, a writer of the show — teach the basics of carrying a rifle, securing a perimeter and so forth. Fortunately, Mr. Hartley is not the gunnery sergeant from “Full Metal Jacket,” but his experience and authority are unmistakable.

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Spencer Gordon

Martina Potratz and an audience member in the participatory show “Surrender.”

In Act II the theatergoers are in a squad, racing through rooms and facing tense scenes in enemy territory: a pregnant mother bristles with resentment at the invasion of her home; lovers are interrupted in an embrace; a lifeless body conceals a machine-gun magazine. The action is hectic but direct, immediate and focused. A fleeting semblance of a bond develops within the unit.

With Act III, after an interlude starring dancers evoking the Playboy bunnies of “Apocalypse Now,” the mood changes abruptly to something distinctly, and familiarly, downtown: a montage of hallucinatory, elaborately choreographed tableaux, here about the stateside traumas of returning G.I.’s.

While this subject has profound merit, the show’s clarity unravels, though the busy cast of 30, under Mr. Fox’s direction, gives it its all. Scenes shift at a blinding rate

from, say, an awards ceremony to a medical facility to a bedroom, all set to snippets of [Amy Winehouse](#), [Green Day](#), [Led Zeppelin](#) and the Beatles.

Often an audience member reads a teleprompter along with the actors, karaoke-like. At one point an ex-G.I. is hired at an abattoir, and the play suggests a vegan screed, likening meat production to ... torture? Whatever. It’s digressive and ineffective. For all the audience participation, such abstractions can’t match the you-are-there impact of the first two acts.

“Surrender” laudably encourages empathy for our troops but doesn’t try to explain just why we are in Iraq and Afghanistan. For that, consult your elected leaders.

“Surrender” continues through Nov. 16 at the Ohio Theater, 66 Wooster Street, SoHo;

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