

## Artifacts of Consequence

Reviewed By: **Andy Propst** · Apr 22, 2009 · New York

If Ashlin Halfnight's *Artifacts of Consequence*, now being presented by the Electric Pear Company at the Wild Project, were a novel, it would be the sort of book that publishers would release in late May and proclaim to be a "beach read." And like those books, the play is satisfying with just enough smarts to make it a guilt-free diversion, despite the fact that the story doesn't completely add up.

Set in a futuristic underwater bunker (an ominously realistic scenic design from Jennifer de Fouchier), the play centers on four characters responsible for saving relics of humankind's past. The no-nonsense Minna (Rebecca Lingafelter) is in charge of operations and Ari (Sara Buffamanti) acts as her assistant. Dallas (Jayd McCarty) is their link to the outside, and he's supposed to bring supplies along with items for preservation, but he never arrives with the former, only the latter, which are presented to a group of evaluators -- played by the audience -- who determine their merit.

During the course of *Artifacts*, Dallas arrives with things ranging from a sneaker and hula-hoop to sheet music from *Oklahoma!* and the script to *Our Town*. It's these cultural items that Dallas believes are most important, and within the bunker, there's a trio of actors (Tobias Burns, Hanna Cheek, and Amy Newhall) on hand to perform them.

Because of Dallas's inability to bring the supplies, the arrival of Theo (Marty Keiser) -- who has all of the necessities that Dallas lacks -- proves fortuitous. His presence also stirs Ari's womanly urges, which have been fueled by 1980s pop culture; she's particularly drawn to *Pretty Woman*. Since Minna's concerned about this, she gives Ari *Silence of the Lambs* and *Deliverance* to watch and *American Psycho* to read in the hope these misogynistic materials might help to cool Ari's passions as well as serve as a none-too-subtle warning about men in general.

Halfnight's ability to inspire audiences to consider the meaning of these various items -- and their importance in our own times and for posterity -- simultaneously impresses and fascinates. The palpable tension in Kristjan Thor's staging, in which scenes are punctuated by loud echoing clangs and electronic bleeps in Mark Valadez's sterling soundscape, makes the production continually engrossing.

And yet, as the piece unfolds, theatergoers may find themselves wondering about such basic questions as what has caused the watery apocalypse above the action. Though one never learns this "why," some other "what's" and "how's" are eventually illuminated, including the real relationship between Minna, Ari, and Dallas.

The entire cast is good; in particular, McCarty charms as the cultural bounty hunter who gleams with delight each time he enters with a new treasure; Kaiser endears from his first entrance, a marvelous mixture of nervousness and nerdiness; and Lingafelter imbues Minna with superlatively chilly officiousness, but still allows the character's warmer nature to periodically surface.



Jayd McCarty and Sara Buffamanti  
in *Artifacts of Consequence*  
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