



CULTURE

"A SINISTER CABAL OF SUPERIOR WRITERS"

Theater Review (L.A.)

The Common Air

By Alex Lyras and Robert McCaskill

Written by [Robert Machray](#)

I missed *The Common Air* when it played Los Angeles last fall. Don't miss it now. It is a remarkable one-man show written by the actor Alex Lyras and the director Robert McCaskill. Together they have devised an intriguing piece of theater about six disparate people conjoined through an arbitrary event - a possible terrorist attack at the airport. It's six degrees of separation, reminding us once again that we are all interconnected.

All the characters are hooked up to some form of cell phone. When the phones fail to help them connect with the events around them, or even with those "loved ones" they can reach, they are forced to reach out to strangers through conversation and examine the circumstances of their lives.



What is on these characters' minds is both hilarious and profound. Alex Lyras is a very talented actor who gives us six very different characterizations, complete with detailed costume changes, accents, accessories (different cell phones and personal items), and different views of the world.

First there is the Iraqi Cab Driver, trying to get by in New York, whose life is a "reality show" which he wants to sell to a passenger so he can have his share of the American dream. The passenger turns out to be a gay Gallery Owner who must decide whether to reunite with a lover he abandoned years ago in a gay-bashing. And so it goes, with Lyras proceeding through the series of characters as each one talks to the next.

The Gallery Owner shares his dilemma with a Corporate Lawyer who, three sheets to the wind, disjointedly carries on a conversation with a DJ about a possible problem the DJ is having with a composer. All the while the Corporate Lawyer is trying to pick up a waitress and at the same time contacting his assistant to get him an alternative flight. **The way Lyras keeps track of the layers of props, conversations (real, texted, and on the cell), and disjointed ramblings of his characters is masterful.**

The hipster DJ talks to a man in the throes of divorce and recreates a piece of rap music he has co-opted from another musician but made his own. The divorcing man (a philosophy teacher) talks to his kid, his wife (on a cell), and another stranger as he fights to keep custody.

It comes full circle back in the cab, with an American passenger who also happens to be of Iraqi descent. He recounts a sad tale of being caught up in a family situation that brings him back to Iraq and turns him into a failed suicide bomber. This is the longest and most involving section. He finds solace watching the Cab Driver, stuck in traffic (like the characters are bogged down in their lives), dance outside his cab - finding, like Zorba, that movement is the answer to life's dilemmas. And so the story ends with a dance. **The stories are life affirming, yet odd enough to keep our rapt attention. The audience gave Lyras a standing ovation.** *The Common Air* has been extended for performances January 16, 23, and 24 at the Lillian Theatre.

ROBERT MACHRAY has appeared in over 150 plays and has worked at 14 Tony Award-winning theatres. He a B.A. from Yale and an M.F.A. from USC.