

SAX & DIXON: THIS PLANE IS DEFINITELY CRASHING **NY Theater.com**

reviewed by Alyssa Simon

Matt Sax and John Dixon are two recent college graduates who have put together a show, *This Plane Is Definitely Crashing*, to showcase their comedic skills. The script, developed from improv, has more than 20 characters of both genders and a variety of ages, races, and nationalities. Although the scenes at first seem unrelated, the stories eventually interweave in a way that has all the characters relating to each other, causing both actors to make split-second changes from one persona to the next. Although the talent is definitely there, the skills required to pull off such diverse characters are not fully developed yet.

This causes some portrayals to come uncomfortably close to racial caricatures. Actually, I'm undecided if this is a deliberate choice. I hope not. One character is a heavy-set African American woman named Katika, played by Dixon. She rolls her eyes and sucks her teeth, doesn't know the meaning of "big vocabulary words," and is loud and crude. She is married to Sharif, a South Asian man she calls Jihad, because he paid her money so he could get a green card. The running joke is whenever she calls him Jihad or tells him he smells like curry, he says, "Now, that's offensive." Are they trying to make a point about stereotypes or are they trying to have it both ways where they can make fun of people yet state that they know they are being offensive, so it's okay?

Other plotlines include a British boy choir on their way back to London, a step-brother and step-sister meeting each other for the first time, two boys trying to scare one's brother in a way that goes horribly wrong, and, most inspired, a grandfather who is a magician with a magic trumpet. The great thing, I think, about improvisational work is that it really frees the imagination to take flights of fancy to the ridiculous and extreme. I so would have liked to see more characters like the grandfather, who can summon flights of condors with his trumpet to help him out of a jam, than watching Sax and Dixon attempt thirty different accents to show off their range.

Unfortunately, the whole point of a showcase was missed. Although director Peter McNerney has sharply defined stage pictures that help his actors move from one character to the next—and when things speed up at the end, it is impressive to watch how quickly each actor can become someone different—I did not get a sense of who Sax and Dixon are: what their points of view on the world are, why they have chosen to say what they do on stage, and why I should relate to or feel for them. I'm sure that will change as they grow as artists, but right now, it's just not that funny.