

## THEATER

## One Actor's Collection of Characters

Rick Foucheux's Roles Range from Bush To 'Bucky'

BY BRAD HATHAWAY

**M**ove quickly and you can catch one of Washington's finest actors in yet another of his remarkable characterizations. Arena Stage is presenting Rick Foucheux in a solo-performance play in which he becomes the designer/scientist/philosopher R. Buckminster Fuller. For something over two hours, Foucheux seems to be Fuller, the slightly off-beat, early prototype of that feature of the digital revolution, the super-intelligent "nerd."

Foucheux brings Fuller to life in all his bizarre uniqueness. For example, during the performance, Foucheux wears two wristwatches and carries a pocket watch. "It comes right out of Bucky's life," he explains. "He traveled a great deal, and he did wear three watches, one set to the time zone he was in, one to the time zone of his next engagement and one to the time zone where his wife was. I always thought with a brain like that he could do the calculating, but I guess he didn't want to bother." The play goes on a bit too long, but that is the fault of the script and not of the actor. Foucheux (pronounced "foh-shay") is fabulous.

It is the latest in a long line of characters made always interesting and frequently fascinating by Foucheux who has worked at most of the major theaters in town. Just recently, he was on the stage at Ford's Theatre in a play that recreated some of the famous debates between Abraham Lincoln (played by Robert Parsons) and Stephen Douglas. It was both an entertaining and a historically fascinating evening in that historic hall.



"R. Buckminster Fuller: The History (and Mystery) of the Universe" is not Foucheux's first solo-performance piece. At Round House's Silver Spring facility he became legendary director Elia Kazan testifying before the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities in "The Director: The Third Act of Elia Kazan." His torment as he faced the moment of decision over whether to "name names" in the committee's search for communists in the entertainment industry is clear and convincing.

Foucheux commands rapt attention from the very first moments of the one-act play. Sitting alone in a small chair on a low platform in the center of a very large dark space, he fairly whispered the early lines of the play, forcing the audience to pay even closer attention than they might have had he been yelling. Again and again he used the power of softness to draw them into the performance, alternating quiet asides with bombas-



In the Ford's Theatre production of "The Rivalry." Photo: T. Charles Erickson.

In the Arena Stage production of "R. Buckminster Fuller: The History (and Mystery) of the Universe" - Photo: Scott Suchman

In the Olney Theatre Center production of "Stuff Happens." Photo: Stan Barouh



tic moments as Kazan struggles with himself to decide what to do at the moment of truth when the committee demands names.

### Other Notable Roles

Even the most “far out” characters don’t seem to faze Foucheux. At Woolly Mammoth, he was a disabled Elvis impersonator in “Cooking with Elvis”; for the Open Circle Theatre, he became Pontius Pilate hosting a television show for a production of “Jesus Christ Superstar.” In that production, the normally non-singing Foucheux used his acting skills to turn his songs into scenes.

Characters don’t have to be fictional, historic or dead to be subject to his ability to make an audience believe they are in the presence of the real thing for the duration of a play. George W. Bush was still in the White House when Foucheux portrayed him in a superb production of David Hare’s drama “Stuff Happens” at the Olney Theatre Center. While the script cuts the then-president little or no slack in its examination of the decisions that led America to war in Iraq following the attacks of September 11, 2001, Foucheux avoided a cartoonish impersonation while using enough of Bush’s mannerisms to establish and maintain his identity from scene to scene. His Bush may have been cocky and free of self doubt, but he also had a strength of command that surprised many of his opponents or, for that matter, supporters.

Foucheux came to Washington in 1982, not as a stage actor but as a morning TV show host. He headlined Channel 7’s “Good Morning America” for almost a year, but television is even more mercurial a business than legitimate theater, and he was looking for work by 1983. He did find work on the stage but didn’t really break into the front ranks of Washington actors until after he had taken a four-year hiatus from the stage and concentrated on film and audio books. When he returned to the stage, however, he soon found he was landing some really important roles at some of the city’s most important theaters.

The steady stream of significant portrayals in solid productions really dates to 2000, the year he won his first (but not his last) Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Actor in a Play. It was for his role in David Mamet’s grim look at a lost soul adrift in the big city, “Edmond” at Source Theatre. The next year he was nominated for that award twice – once for the Washington Stage Guild and Source Theatre Company joint production of Eugene O’Neill’s “Hughie,” and the other for his performance as a bitter policeman

in George F. Walker’s “Heaven.”

In 2006 he won his second Helen Hayes award as the conflicted homosexual accountant in the Studio Theatre mounting of “Take Me Out.” It was a great role in the hands of a great actor: the same role earned the Tony Award for the actor who played it on Broadway – Denis O’Hare. I had the pleasure of seeing both of those performances, and for my money, Foucheux did more with the part and was both more interesting and more touching than O’Hare.

Buckminster Fuller isn’t the first role he’s played for Arena Stage. The last time he was on Arena’s temporary stage in Crystal City, it was in one of the most important roles for a mature male actor in the catalogue of American drama, that of the salesman Willy Loman in Arthur Miller’s “Death of a Salesman.”

He even brought a dead man to life in “Dead Man’s Cell Phone” at Woolly Mammoth. He had a marvelous monologue in that piece – an 11-minute gem after his character had settled into the peculiar hell that playwright Sarah Ruhl envisioned for him.

What is somewhat astonishing is that all of these roles have been played out on Washington stages. He did head off to New York to appear in the Irish Repertory Theatre’s “Emperor Jones” last year and also worked at the McCarter Theatre in New Jersey. Now, he says, after “sniffing around up there I learned, not too surprisingly, that they are all right when they say ‘there’s no place like home.’”

So, what’s next for Foucheux? He’ll spend the next year as an “artist in residence” at Theater J at the DC Jewish Community Center on 16th Street. He’ll be a “bombastic right-wing television talk show host” in Willy Holtzman’s “Something You Did,” pair up with another fabulous local actor, J. Fred Shiffman, in Neil Simon’s “The Odd Couple,” and then star as Reb Saunders in Aaron Posner’s adaptation of Chaim Potok’s novel “The Chosen.” That, he says, “pretty much fills up the year!”

It certainly gives theatergoers a head start on filling up their year.

---

*Brad Hathaway operated Potomac Stages, a website and email service covering theater in Washington, Maryland and Virginia and has written about theater for Theatre.Com, Musical Stages Online, The Connection Newspapers and such magazines as American Theatre, Show Music, the Sondheim Review and Live Design. He and his wife live on Capitol Hill. He can be reached by email at Brad@PotomacStages.com. ★*

# On View

through May 25

## EXTENDING THE BOOK

The Art of Extra-Illustration

ERIN C. BLAKE AND  
STUART SILLARS



Folger SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY  
Advancing knowledge & the arts

201 East Capitol Street, Washington, DC 20003 www.folger.edu

Café BERLIN



Fine German Cuisine

New Summer Menu!

Sunday Brunch  
10 AM to 3 PM – Special Menu

Sunday Dinner – 3 to 10 PM

Visit [www.cafeberlindc.com](http://www.cafeberlindc.com)

202-543-7656

322-B Massachusetts Ave., NE • Washington, DC 20002