



## **‘Bond’ electrifies audiences with heart and soul**



Powerful, funny, dramatic, heart-wrenching, and heart-warming, “Bond” captures the audience in the first three seconds and holds them hypnotized throughout the performance, generating an enthusiastic, well-deserved standing ovation.

Broadway, take notice, Logan Black’s one-man and a dog-puppet could be a contender for best play as it begins its sequence of World Premiere performances with this production in Kansas City. Black first crafted his piece “Bond: A Soldier and His Dog” for the KC Fringe Festival in 2015 and scored highly with the Fringe crowd. Since then, he took the show to several other cities with strong reviews to match his Fringe success.



Now, rather than a one man show, Black adds a puppet created by Mike Horner, puppet designer from Paul Mesner Puppet Theater and changes the dynamics of his original piece. Now, with beautiful puppet mastery, Erica Lynnette Baker moves with the puppet and enacts the movement and training of the dog. Dressed in army fatigues, Baker disappears and the audience focuses on the dog/puppet and not the puppeteer.

The Unicorn Theatre, known for presenting new works to Kansas City audiences, once again discovered a diamond. Producing artistic director Cynthia Levin said that working with Black for the last year to help develop the show was a joy. Now, ready for audiences, “Bond” continues Levin’s successful string of plays that challenge and entertain Unicorn audiences.



The addition of the puppet makes the story move in a new

direction because as Black speaks, the audience can see the dog's movements rather than imagine them. The change allows Black to tell his story with more excitement, drama, and emotion. The change takes the audience on a thrill ride with humor mixed with drama for an electrifying theatre experience.

“Logan Black’s ‘Bond’ is so emotionally overwhelming not only because of how personal the story is, but because another Kansas City artist has so completely taken control of his own storytelling with wisdom and assurance,” Darren Sextro, well-established Kansas City director, said. “Cynthia Levin has helped to shape this into yet another original work that will find a path to plenty of future venues.”



Upon his stage entrance, Black grabs the audience's attention in the first two seconds of the play, clenches his fist around that attention, and strongholds the attention through the final words. On opening night, the energy from actor to audience was overpowering. The return energy of the audience to the actor was intense throughout the play. While watching the audience during the performance, no one moved. Heads remained still; eyes focused on the action; some leaned forward in anticipation; no one coughed, sneezed, shuffled feet. They were hypnotized and completely under Black's control.

“Bond” tells the story of an army grunt who decides to become a dog handler. He is partnered with Diego, a yellow Labrador Retriever, trained, and then dispatched to Iraq. Black’s compelling story begins with a recurring nightmare and then flashes back to his story about how he met and bonded with a particular dog in a love at first sight meeting. Black and Diego were destined to become a team, and their story, like all dog stories excites the viewers.



The story tells of the hazards of war, the safety necessary to survive, and the length one goes to live in a hostile environment with death traps (land mines) everywhere. Survival becomes the focus of each waking second. Black takes the audience there with the help of the puppet, providing a visual aid for the audience to see and react.

The puppet becomes a silent partner in telling the story. One person said upon exit that she wanted to pet the puppet. Yes, it’s that convincingly crafted and handled. Kudos to Baker as the puppet master. Mesner Puppets, specifically Mike Horner deserve recognition for the creating of Diego.

“Bond” becomes a love story of a union born out of love and respect. Black tells of the horrors of war and mixes in humorous tidbits to keep the story alive and the audience in

his grasp. He tells stories of his and Diego's successes, skirmishes with death, fear, and an outhouse pit. As the play continues, the stories blend together, telling of the closeness that develops between partners. Black and Diego function as one when on duty. Off duty, they become owner and loyal companion.



Telling more of the story would only detract from the enjoyment and surprise of future audiences. Those who already viewed the performance know how the surprise element adds to the overall effect of the story. No one will leave disappointed.

Black's story deserves to head onward and upward. "Bond" is as good as many plays that run on Broadway. Yes, it's that good. Do not miss the opportunity to see a local play with the makings of a phenomenal strong run.

Unicorn's producing artistic director recognizes outstanding works when she sees them. "Bond" made its Fringe Festival debut at The Unicorn in 2015 and has been performed several times since. But, this re-crafted piece with Levin's input and direction take "Bond" to new vistas. The show leaves audiences talking.

The cast is Logan Black and a puppet of Diego under the masterful puppeteering of Erika Lynnette Baker. The Artistic staff that brought the newest version to life are led by

Cynthia Levin, producing artistic director of The Unicorn.

The staff is Tanya Brown, stage manager; Kelli Harrod, scenic designer; Nicole Jaja, lighting design; Emily Swenson, projection design; Ian R. Crawford, costume design; Davie Kiehl sound design; Abigayle Huggins, properties design; Mike Horner, puppet designer; Hannah Taylor, dramaturg; Steve Churpich, master electrician & lighting design; Jerry Mahen, assistant projection design; Chloe Robbins, production assistant & sound board operator.

“Bond” plays through May 19. Book tickets early as word of mouth will spread fast and this play will sell out many performances. Tickets and more information can be found on [The Unicorn's website](#).

Tags: “Bond” review, The Unicorn Theatre, Kansas City Theatre, Kansas City Performing Arts, Kansas City Arts & Entertainment