

[True Fringe: New City Stage Company's SAVAGE/LOVE and TONGUES](#)

By
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– September 8, 2011 **Posted in:** [Reviews](#)

New City Stage Company makes its debut at the Fringe Festival this year with a pair of short but intense stream-of-consciousness monologues by Sam Shepard and Joseph Chaiken, SAVAGE/LOVE and TONGUES. Created in the late '70s, the avant-garde explorations of love and death through sound and movement perfectly suit the definition of what the Fringe should be: on the edge, outside the boundary of mainstream theater. Under the keen direction of Ryder Thornton, NCSC's updated production is all that—edgy, experimental, challenging, and an eminently successful foray into the Fringe.



Russ Widdall (seen here in a pre-production photo) stars as the anguished protagonist in New City Stage Company's SAVAGE/LOVE and TONGUES. (Photo credit: Annie R. Such)

Presented in the intimate space of Symmetry Dance Wellness Studio, audience members can choose to forsake a traditional seat for floor pillows, putting them in close proximity to Russ Widdall's tour-de-force portrayal of a tormented soul at two stages of life. Channeling the voices in his character's head, the masterful Widdall is eerily convincing as the emotionally disturbed Poet, who desperately fantasizes about an unknown love, then feverishly contemplates his imminent death, ultimately gaining insight into the meaning of life and the inadequacy of just words to explain it.

Shepard's rhythmic poetry is accentuated here by stylized movements that pay homage to interpretive dance, and by the eloquent percussion of New York's DJ Butterface. Employing the latest digital technology (laptop, MIDI keyboard, iPad) and an array of exotic instruments (woodscraper, cabasa, metal pan and pipe, rainstick, cymbals, floor tom, bongos, dumbek, claves, cowbell, and a plastic tub), Butterface accurately and emphatically punctuates Widdall's rapidly cycling moods, shifting characters, and anguished psyche.

The expressive lighting of Matt Sharp, costumes by Amy Chmielewski, and sets by S. Cory Palmer further augment the deeply personal spirit of this theatrical experience, which is more collaborative performance art than traditional play. You will leave this first-rate production feeling that, in the words of the Poet, "Today the tree bloomed without a word. Tonight I'm learning its language."

SAVAGE/LOVE AND TONGUES

Written and conceived by Sam Shepard and Joseph Chaiken

September 2-17, 2011

New City Stage Company

Symmetry Dance Wellness Studio

1923 Chestnut Street, 3rd Floor

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<http://newcitystage.org/>