



Q&A with Dean Farell Bruggeman & Eric Cire by Dan Berkowitz

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Okay, the bronchitis is getting better, but sloooooowly, which is not fun.

What is fun is that the play I'm in New York to direct is opening. It's called *Opaline*, it's by Fengar Gael, it'll be at the Secret Theatre in Long Island City, the cast is fantastic, and it's being produced by Rose Desena, who used to write the theatre reviews for *The Los Angeles Post*.

It's true: the entire world of the theatre is really populated by only seventeen people.

Two more of those seventeen are **Dean Farell Bruggeman** and **Eric Cire**. Dean has written a play called *Only the Moon Howls*, and Eric has directed it. The show is playing at Theatre Unleashed in North Hollywood through March 12.



Dean Farell Bruggeman (L) and Eric Cire

Recently, I asked the guys a few questions...

Dan Berkowitz: In thirty seconds, can you tell us what *Only the Moon Howls* is about?

Dean Farell Bruggeman: *Only the Moon Howls* is about a married couple who've been together 15 years and find themselves faced with the unexpected end of their shared journey. Facilitated by a quartet of guides tasked with rapidly moving things along, the play depicts Whitney & Jake reliving highlights & low points of their relationship, sometimes dismayed to find details changed and shortcuts taken in pursuit of "a more interesting version of the emotional truth." The overriding theme of the play: if our time together ended today, which memories would last and which regrets would haunt?

Eric Cire: *Only the Moon Howls* is the story of Jake and Whitney, two people who met, fell in love, and built a life together, past tense. Only the world doesn't always see it that way, or in the right order...

DB: Leave it to a director to boil it down to the basics! Dean, what made you write it – and Eric, how did you get involved with it?

DFB: I was inspired to write the play by my own marriage, which this year reaches the 15-year mark. I can honestly say the time has flown by, and it's surreal to me that a random coffeehouse meeting in 2001 became a lifelong commitment by two people dedicated to growing old together. I hoped to capture that surrealism theatrically in a way that would resonate on a very personal level with audiences who are or have been in long-term relationships or are hopeful of finding one.

EC: I had heard great things from the folks who had seen it at Fringe, and had wanted to get back into the game in terms of directing. Some of those same people gave me a nudge or two and said I might want to take a look at the script and think about throwing my hat into the ring and, as it turns out, they were right on both accounts.

DB: So. I gather the show started at the Hollywood Fringe. What made you begin it there, and how has it changed – or has it? – now that it's moved to Theatre Unleashed.

DFB: I chose to premiere the play in the 2015 Hollywood Fringe Festival because the fest lends itself to projects that can be easily staged in spartan conditions. In terms of design & technology, Fringe productions often benefit from a “less is more” approach, and *Only the Moon Howls* is a play in which all the action is either memory recreation or negotiations of the terms under which they'll be created; naturalism is not on the menu here, and *Moon* can most effectively be presented in spare settings. The play has changed substantially, and for the better, in the Theatre Unleashed production. My original script indicated that one actor played The Guide, who in turn would play the six characters appearing throughout the married couple's memories; this was how I staged it in the Fringe. Eric's concept of the play opened up that singularity to create a quartet of guides who share those roles, creating a Greek-chorus feel that definitely increases the sense of urgency inherent in the play. The fact that each weekend's performances feature a different track for those four guides means that each of them plays every role throughout the run, making each weekend unique. Also, Eric's wonderful set design adds to the play's black-box simplicity a heightened utilitarianism via an exposed backstage area used for storage...in this case, of materials used in the couple's memories. Both of these elements have expanded my own understanding of what this play is, and what it can be in future productions, and I have incorporated them into the script. Additionally, Eric's double-casting of Whitney & Jake has created four distinct chemistries for this married couple. Experiencing these different emotional shadings to my characters in a single production has personally been a thrill for me, as it feels like rediscovering the relationship each time I see it; knowing some audience members are returning to the show for that same opportunity is a gift for a playwright.

EC: The show has changed... Er... A lot. It was originally cast as a show with three people onstage in a three person cast and I decided to turn that into an eight person play, nine with understudy, with six people onstage per show. The Guide was originally one part, I divvied it up into four (though they're all still playing the same character). The script, I believe, is largely the same though.



Dean Farrell Bruggeman

DB: Eric, what kind of collaboration has this been? Does Dean sit in on all rehearsals? Does Dean participate actively, or do you two wait and discuss strategy afterward? Have you agreed on everything, or have there been any knock-down-drag-out fights? Feel free to say the worst about each other...

EC: Dean was actually really busy with another play during the rehearsal process for this show, and wasn't able to see ANYTHING till opening night. We traded a few emails but that was it. I was personally happy in that regard as I hadn't seen the show at Fringe and didn't want to be beholden in any regard to that production, and Dean encouraged that in a huge way, which I can't thank him enough for. I literally never met him until our opening night, but he's been the biggest champion for this production we could ask for.

DFB: My involvement in this show was purely as the supportive playwright who was eager to take his seat on Opening Night. Eric has been extremely respectful of the text & tone & themes of the play, and had an occasional question for me when rehearsals were ramping up. I could not be more excited about Theatre Unleashed's production of this play!

DB: You've double-cast the show. Why did you do that, and what are the challenges? Do the casts get separate rehearsals, or is it a big pile-up?

EC: Theatre Unleashed had been thinking about moving to a double-casting system for a while and decided to roll it out with this show. In the past there had been some difficulties with the understudy system as it existed and the company wanted to see if double-casting might have been more effective. I was extremely excited to give it a try, as I've always loved the opportunity as an actor to see other people perform the same part I'm working on so that I can contrast and compare the decisions that person makes versus those that I would, personally. So in this case all actors would attend every rehearsal and take the opportunity to watch the others perform and play around with

what they were doing and get in depth in discussing what they're doing in the show from moment to moment and really hone those characters that much more scrutinously.

DB: What's a fun thing about each of you that no one else knows? (And we guarantee not to tell...)

DFB: I occasionally blurt out an impromptu Tony Award acceptance speech to my dogs.

EC: I'm a pretty open book, sometimes a bit TOO open, as anyone who knows me will tell you... I guess it's not especially common knowledge that I grew up on a prison colony, where my dad worked and where housing was provided on grounds for a lot of the staff. I used to get my hair cut by the inmates.

Hmmm. I understand about the Tony speech; I have several versions of mine already in the computer. Not sure I'd want convicted murderers getting close to me with scissors, though. Glad I'm bald...

Only the Moon Howls

Written by Dean Farell Bruggeman

Directed by Eric Cire

Through March 12

Theatre Unleashed

The Belfry Stage Upstairs at the Crown

11031 Camarillo Street

North Hollywood, CA 91602

Tickets: 818-849-4039 or www.theatreunleashed.org