



George Brant's

GROUNDED

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Cardinal production of 1-woman show a genuine tour de force

By Matthew Waterman H-T Reviewer

Imagine a war in which the soldiers come home every day after work; a war in which the enemy is 18 inches away, yet 18,000 miles away. Imagine a war fought from a trailer slightly outside Las Vegas.

We don't have to imagine; that war exists, and we are waging it right now.

Unmanned aerial vehicles (also known as "drones") are only one part of U.S. military activity in Afghanistan, but they are a growing part.

As remote warfare enters deeper into our national discussion, playwright George Brant has become perhaps the first to address drones in detail on stage. "Grounded" is a one-woman show that is sweeping the nation, with a multitude of productions in the past two years and an upcoming New York City production starring Anne Hathaway.

Cardinal Stage Company presents "Grounded" in the intimate Rose Firebay Theatre. Stephen John makes his directorial debut at Cardinal with "Grounded," and award-winning actor Greta Wohlrabe plays The Pilot (we never get the character's name).

There's nothing The Pilot loves more than flying. She was born to soar through the blue of the Afghanistan sky. She's never more at home than when she's overseas.

Life moves along swimmingly until she gets pregnant. You can't be a fighter pilot when you're pregnant.

This surprise pregnancy forces her to move back to the mainland. She's happy to be with her family, but she longs for the blue.

After a few years, The Pilot finally receives a call to duty. But it's not the one she was hoping for; she is being deployed to Nevada so she can serve in "the chair force." She is to become a drone pilot.

In her 70-minute monologue, The Pilot recounts her endeavors in maintaining a normal family life while spending 84 hours a week deciding who lives or dies on the other side of the planet. As she puts it: "It would be a different book—'The Odyssey' — if Odysseus came home every day."

If the quality of the show can be taken as evidence of Wohlrabe and John's artistic compatibility, then the two are an excellent match.

Wohlrabe delivers a powerful and sensitive solo performance. We see every side of The Pilot at some point in the play, from the most hardcore to the most fragile. She takes the beats when she needs them, but the pace flies at times of intensity.

"Grounded" could easily fall into the monotony one-person shows are known for if not for Mike Price's sound design. When The Pilot recalls a drone being assembled, we hear it happen. When she zooms off to work in her car, we hear the zoom. When she's listening to AC/DC, we listen along with her.

Kate Ashton's lighting and Harrison Haug's projections also help transport us to the depths of The Pilot's imagination and memory.

The play contains some adult language and content.

Brant's piece raises timely questions and packs an emotional punch. "Grounded" is a genuine tour de force.