

# We Are Traffic: A Rideshare Adventure<sup>i</sup>

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In his show, *We are Traffic*, Jonathan Tipton Meyers proves a particularly dexterous story-teller, painting vivid pictures with unexpected analogies and hilarious gestures that really occupy the empty stage, putting us right inside the experience.

If you are like me, you've probably not put too much thought into white shirts, but Jonathan shows us how a white shirt can bring a person to life in a story. Whether it is the pristine white crisp shirt worn by gay men or the shirt that turns itself into a suit tailored for cool-looking Japanese youngsters, these descriptions really help us feel closer to these unique figures.

People step out of cardboard cut outs in the back seat and begin to obtain a texture marked by small things like how they run up to the cab door, how they pick up the phone, or even the kind of radio station they listen to. Jonathan's descriptions of the midnight drunks as 'weebles' makes it impossible to hold back a giggle.

Not only do these characters come to life, but they also come closer together on these crazy trips. In one of the anecdotes, the drunken girls in their early 20s, Ashley and Hannah, join Jonathan to clean his car after a small accident that starts out as an elegant save and ends up with a not-so-elegant vomited-on back seat. On an even stranger note, Jonathan shares his adventures with the irresistible Kiko, starting off with a somewhat strange but reasonable invitation to a sake bar which ends up with a James Bond style grand car escape and gunshots. In the end he even gets that hot movie kiss, or not quite, as he admits that didn't actually happen... The kiss that is!

The production starts to take on a slightly heavier tone as Jonathan dives deep into the consequences of segregation and how the shared trips introduced by UberX marked rather than bridged social divides. These reflections lead to the more general issues of loneliness, racism and xenophobia in the USA, which the fast pace of the performance manages to distribute with a healthy dose of humour.

But throughout this show, Jonathan always returns to moments of release, even if it's just a second to go for that pee he's been holding in for way too long, or a moment to celebrate the fantastically soft Starbucks loo rolls that cover his whole hand. It is this bodily release which sticks with us at the end too, as Jonathan tells us about his toilet stop where things finally 'flow' again, and indeed, everything seems to flow out, physical and emotional. In the midst of work, social issues, this production shows us all the ups and downs of dealing with a wide range of customers from a wide range of backgrounds at all sorts of hours, without forgetting to pass on a strangely mindful and yet comical message: listen to your body!

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## Alex Haydn-Williams

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'Once you get in my car', Jonathan Tipton Meyers tells us at the start of *We Are Traffic: A Rideshare Adventure*, 'I care about you more than anyone in my family'. He's joking. But after his hour-long monologue, you start to feel it's true. *We Are Traffic* is a stand-up show, but watching it feels like sitting in the back of Meyers' cab, listening to your new favourite Uber driver tell you tales of his time on the road.

In a plaid shirt, paired with jeans and a dark backdrop, our driver for the evening conjures up worlds. Well, Los Angeles at least. His ensemble cast changes as the night goes on, starting with a couple in transit between \$28 artichoke risotto and the new episode of *Game of Thrones*, and ending messily, as the USC architect on a reluctant evening out fails to keep her drunk sorority pal's head out of the window.

Meyers ended up driving after his company failed and his girlfriend left him. The company was a sidetrack from writing, he tells us. So perhaps meeting all these characters was the perfect way to get back on the rails. The LA Freeway, he explains, divides the city: the poor, multiethnic Eastside is kept apart from the wealthy, white Valley. Except everybody gets the same cabs.

That offers a real platform for social studies, and Meyers can pinpoint people in a phrase. 'Their t-shirts are crisp and white, in that way gay guys' t-shirts are always crisp and white'; 'he was *organically* attractive'. But it also allows him to make a broader point about the ghettoisation of the city.

*We Are Traffic* was filmed in LA, in front of a live audience. It's a very local show, which has its downsides; 'has anyone been to that place where...' routines fall a little flat, when you definitely haven't. But the town's division – 'we are not just separated, we are segregated' – feels relevant to all cities. We live near one another. But, Meyers asks, do we live together? And where's the nearest public loo?

By turns funny, by turns chastening, *We Are Traffic* exposes the gig economy's underbelly with wit, and a refreshingly human perspective. Across Sunset Boulevard and through the past five years without drawing breath, Meyers' show cleverly parallels a driver's fleeting intimacy with his customers. But usually, a rider shuts the door, gives a star-rating and a tip, and moves on. After this ride, your driver's insights will stay with you for a long, long time.

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