

# “Afghanistan is Not Funny”

By Samantha Simmonds-Ronceros - 06/21/2022



*A NoHo Arts theatre review of "Afghanistan Is Not Funny," written and performed by Henry Naylor, and produced by Fringe Management at this year's Hollywood Fringe Festival.*

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[Henry Naylor](#) is a UK comedian and three-time Edinburgh Fringe First winner, which is pretty rare. Winning the Edinburgh Fringe, not being a comedian in the UK. The persistent rain and cold make conditions perfect for the preponderance of comedians. But Henry is rarer still in that he is a playwright who has been nominated and awarded dozens of international awards, including France's most prestigious award for the arts, The Globes De Cristal. His plays have run Off Broadway and been translated into eight languages.

This play, "Afghanistan Is Not Funny" is an account of his trip to Afghanistan a couple of decades ago while he was researching a new play, "Finding Bin Laden." The trip was arranged with the help of his friend Phil, a war correspondent cameraman for the BBC, and he teamed up with another mate, Sam Maynard, a photographer who was keen to get shots of the country.

This was when Afghanistan was in flux, the Taliban and the Mujahideen were everywhere and the country was in a similar state to what it is now. No money, no safety, roving warlords, littered war paraphernalia and unexploded mines. And in amongst them, people, trying to survive. It was very, very dangerous, particularly for a tall white Englishman and his paler Scottish companion. Fortunately, they had a wonderful if inexperienced guide and the luck of the naive.

Henry walks us through what got him there, the meetings, the series of fortunate events that aligned the stars in his favour. And suddenly, he finds himself in Afghanistan with no plan and the weirdest of excuses to be there.



It's a riveting play and Henry Naylor is absolutely mesmerising as he commands the stage with a slightly quizzical look of disbelief that this even ever actually occurred. A playwright in Kabul, doing a bit of research, chatting up the locals for their stories and trying not to get kidnaped.

Their guide takes them all over the city and out into the wilder parts nearby to search for destroyed tanks and unexploded shells. If something was 'cool' they took pictures and it seems like there were lots of opportunities for this.

Of course the hubris of it all was not lost on either one of them and it did seem as if their luck had finally run out when they encountered a group of Mujahideen keen to take them to their leader. Just when all seemed lost they charmed their way out of danger and into a valley littered with the remains of thousands of tanks. More pictures were taken and they headed for the airport and home.

However, their last stop at a refugee camp was what changed them both when a girl quite literally stopped their hearts holding out a bundle to them. The photo Sam Maynard took of her is the last image Henry shows of his adventure and by far the most poignant. I'll leave it to your imaginations as to what exactly it was. Suffice it to say, I haven't shaken the image myself just yet.



“Afghanistan Is Not Funny” is a documentary play, if there is such a thing. It stirs the soul, it astonishes with its brutal forensic revelations and it’s also brilliantly funny and very very English.

Henry Naylor is a master at this, but it is his truthfulness that is his most effective weapon in his playwright arsenal. He is shockingly truthful. About everything. His purpose for being there, his disappointment at losing out on a film deal that lead to this reckless trip, his unhinged arrogance at looking for a play in the depths of human despair. But he knows this and he fully acknowledges his yawning vanity as he reflects on his journey to self realisation and he leaves us with that picture of the girl to show us.

It’s a truly astonishing performance by an utterly brilliant writer full of moments you won’t easily forget and a message we all need to hear over and over again. War is shit and there is no winner. Ever.

The show continues for the rest of this week. It’s the kind of play you will never see again, so I encourage you to share in Henry Naylor’s story while you can.

<http://henrynaylor.co.uk>

## When:

Tuesday, June 21 9:30 PM

Wednesday, June 22, 7:00 PM

Thursday, June 23, 8:00 PM

Friday, June 24, 5:30 PM

Saturday, June 25, 9:30 PM

## Where:

The Broadwater Second Stage

6320 Santa Monica Blvd, Los Angeles, 90038

## Tickets:

<https://www.hollywoodfringe.org/projects/7531>



## Author: [Samantha Simmonds-Ronceros](#)

Samantha Simmonds-Ronceros is a British writer and filmmaker living In Los Angeles.

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