



Poppies PICK

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By Nancy Ellen Shore

Political theatre devotees will appreciate Lane Keller's *Poppies*. Based on her novel *Covenant of Poppies*, the explosive, fast-paced, 75-minute one-act is set in Belgrade during the 1999 NATO bombing. Expertly staged by Sherri Eden Barber in a style of gritty realism reminiscent of Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest* -- including onstage violence and nudity -- the work focuses on several young people caught up in a hell of war, illegal arms dealing, drugs, genocide, propaganda, and racism.

The talented ensemble includes Brandt Adams' cynical, subversive radio deejay; Sara Gozalo's Albanian Muslim in love with a Serb whose compatriots murdered her family; Marco Formosa's racist, sadistic general; Dana Mazzenga's bitter, disillusioned bartender; Gil Bar-Sela's and Frank De Julio's vicious, boozing, uneducated soldiers; Shawn Barber's horrified American journalist; and Evan Greenspoon's soldier tormented by conflicting allegiances.

Designer Vi Levy's multilevel set and civilian and military costumes and composer Nikola Matic's fusion of traditional folk melodies with alternative rock are impressive.

Presented by 5th Wall Theatre Company as part of the New York International Fringe Festival

at the Connelly Theater, 220 E. Fourth St., NYC.

Aug. 17-26. Remaining performances: Wed., Aug. 22, 7:45 p.m.; Thu., Aug. 23, 3 p.m.; Sat., Aug. 25, noon; Sun., Aug. 26, 3:45 p.m.

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