

# Embedded

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By [Laura Hitchcock](#)

"Embedded", the term used for journalists authorized by the United States Government to cover the recent invasion of Iraq, is the title chosen by Tim Robbins for his own coverage of that event, written and directed by Robbins at his Actors' Gang Theatre. Compassionate and scathing, it's a powerful production of a very well-written play with a definite anti-war point of view.

The young soldiers, male and female, have poignant scenes with their loved ones at home before being sent overseas. Especially familiar is one Jen Ryan whose father regrets he got laid off and couldn't afford to send her to college. Wounded, hospitalized and rescued like that other blonde with the Irish name, she protests to her family that she was well treated in the Iraqi hospital, despite attempts to propagandize her ordeal.

Feeling less well treated are the embedded journalists under the tough disciplinary training of Sarge who provides a twist on the usual meanie by couching his

commands and threats in theatrical quotes. He could be the mobster singing "Brush Up Your Shakespeare" in *Kiss Me, Kate*. A slice of the journalistic life takes place in a bar where a man introduces himself to a woman, not recognizing her as someone he slept with a few weeks ago. He's the same journalist who decides to dis-embed himself in the political sense of the word to escape the censorship imposed on the approved writers.

The realistic ordeal of the troops alternates with a Greek Chorus in masks reminiscent of the *Twilight Zone* episode in which all the world is deformed, including the doctor who tries to turn a beautiful young girl into a similar creature to conform to their standards of beauty. These characters, which include a woman named Gondola and a man called Rum-Rum, give a *Saturday Night Live* spin to conspiracy theories. "If we don't get this war started soon, we'll be competing with the NBA play-off," squeals one of them.

Audience members are warned by an introductory voice-over not to disrupt the play by shouting out their own opinions. They will be ejected and will not get their money back.

Robbins displays an adroit directorial hand, creating a production that's vivid and theatrical, while giving full measure to the soldiers' stories and allowing the excellent ensemble time to make their moments. Richard Hoover designed the stark set with masks ranged against the wall in a stunning Kabuki effect. The specific and subtle lighting was designed by Adam H. Greene, with spots highlighting each incident, emphasizing the Brechtian alienation inherent in the piece.

Viewpoint aside, this is a deftly composed, artfully assembled and brilliantly presented play, alternating the touching humanity of the soldiers' lives with a satiric and savage portrait of puppets creating war.