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***Take Me Home*, part of the Other Forces Festival, is a play set in an actual taxi**

Modesto “Flako” Jimenez is both an actor and a cab driver, but he never thought he’d have a job that would require both skills at the same. Then he got the lead role in *Take Me Home*, a play that’s set in an actual taxi.

“I’ve been training for this since 2006!” he says. That’s the year he started his day (or rather, night) job as a livery cab driver, a gig that gives him the freedom to clock in whenever he wants and to skip work for an audition.

So far, he’s found that *Take Me Home*, which is written by Alexandra Collier and directed by Meghan Finn, is not so different from real life. In the play, which runs through January 26 as part of Incubator Arts Project’s Other Forces Festival, Jimenez plays a hack named Ace who drives aimlessly through lower Manhattan, regaling his passengers with words of wisdom and the story of a failed love affair. Jimenez can be just as personal with his actual fares, taking their pictures and having them write poems in the back seat. So far, he’s collected over 1,000 poems. “It keeps the art alive in my cab,” he says. “Young people are usually the most open to it, like, ‘I’m an artist, take my picture!’”



The play also raises questions about what being in a cab actually means. For instance, as they go on their ride, audience members pass about a dozen actors who are planted on the street, which taps into the sense of voyeurism that comes from watching the outside world through a taxi window. (The show lasts about 40 minutes, with three trips a night, so only nine people can see it per day.)

Inside the cab, there are specially created segments for the radio and Taxi TV, but the audience’s most intense connection is with Ace himself. For Collier, that proximity underscores the entire purpose of her script: “The relationship you have with your cab driver is complicated because they’re your servants, but they’re also in control,” she says. “It’s pretty rare that we engage with that person as another human being. This cab ride, this show, is an experience of having to see a cab driver, see this person for who they really are, one individual in the millions and millions of cabs.”

To that end, Collier threw out 90 percent of what she had written in order to accommodate Jimenez’s real-life experiences behind the wheel. Some of his monologues are now taken verbatim from his own memories.

But since he’s playing a role that is so closely informed by his own life, can Jimenez really separate himself from his character? “I have to push myself out of it, otherwise it will be too damaging for my head,” he says. “I have to become Ace. Ace presses these cues, this is Ace’s world, not mine. I don’t drive a yellow cab. I drive a Jeep. Little things like that help.”

Still, there are certain elements of real life that he can’t escape. For instance, despite the fact that the cab he’s driving is decommissioned and has the letters TMH decaled on the side, Jimenez has angered unsuspecting New Yorkers by refusing to pick them up. “I had to turn the meter off because people kept hailing me,” he says. “They don’t even let me explain. They say, ‘You just don’t want to pick me up!’”

For the cast and crew, presenting a show in January also meant enduring tech rehearsals during snowstorm Hercules.

“[During the storm] we were driving at a snail’s pace, the actors were not in the right place because they couldn’t get there fast enough, and the sound wasn’t working properly,” Collier recalls. “It was like a typical tech rehearsal where everything goes wrong, but amplified by 300 percent because you’re in a cab and you’re moving.”

Despite the snow, wind, and low visibility, Jimenez kept his cool during rehearsal, staying in character, hitting his marks, and keeping the cab on the road. Because as a cabbie, he says, there can never be an off night.

“I’m a cab driver, and you’ve got to be out there no matter what,” he says. “Meghan is one of the best directors I’ve ever had. She just said, ‘Do what you’re doing and make sure you don’t crash.’”