



## 1968 by the History Theatre at the History Center of Minnesota

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Produced by the History Theatre at the Minnesota History Center, in tandem with the exhibit that opened last fall, *1968* is also a collaborative project with the Playwrights Center. Seven scenes written by PWC members tell personal stories that are representative of significant events during that year.

The scenes were ingeniously connected by a timeline created by History Theatre artistic director, Ron Peluso, who also directed. Music snippets from familiar TV shows, primarily, arranged and directed by Gary Rue and delivered by a talented band of McNally-Smith students, cemented the segues.

The scenes:

*Welcome Home* by Reginald Edmund offered a highly personal look at one Viet Nam war veteran dealing with his combat experience after he came home. Eric Knutson as Jerry showed great sensitivity and range in his portrayal of the troubled soldier. The ending, however, needed some foreshadowing to better bring us along with him.

*Go Up Together*, written by Christina Ham, portrays the relationship of two friends struggling with the question of taking sides in the Memphis, Tennessee, sanitation workers strike. But the play, as well as the incident dramatized, has far more to do with the larger question of a Black man's identity and place in society.

The experience of Rosemary Clooney depicted in *Rosemary* by Kevin Kautzman, seemed an odd choice, although it showed us the impact Bobby Kennedy's death had on others, including those we might not have connected with the presidential contender. Karen Weber convincingly depicted Clooney's mental collapse; however, you needed to know the back story, since it wasn't clearly scripted, to fully appreciate its meaning.

*John Mitchell's Private Moment* by Dominic Orlando is a wonderful piece of well-crafted satire. Paul de Cordova as Richard Nixon and E.J. Subkoviak as John Mitchell (plus compressed cameos of Henry Kissinger and others) take us inside the heads of these two controversial figures in a darkly comic imagining of the events and attitudes that ultimately led to their famous demise. Cordova picks on just a couple of Nixon's verbal and visual ticks to fashion his impersonation, and it works beautifully. Subkoviak delivered an immensely satisfying and entertaining tour de force. He simply owned the evening.

*Smith & Carlos* by Kim Hines made room for what anyone who remembers 1968 may have been thinking: what do these young people know about it? That the show could ultimately laugh at itself a little, too, was refreshing.



John Mitchell (E.J. Subkoviak) and Richard Nixon (Paul de Cordova) strategize about how to make Nixon the Republican nominee for president. Photo: Scott Pakudaitis.

*The Corral* by Rhianna Yazzie was inspired by the founding of the American Indian Movement (AIM) in Minnesota, but dramatized via the brutal treatment by police of two Indian men leaving the Corral on Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis. This device, however, didn't give those unfamiliar with AIM much to go on, but M. Cochise Anderson, in particular, as Moon evoked the conditions that gave birth to AIM and the passions driving the movement. Rob Thomas offered an interesting counterpoint as his companion.

*Apollo 8* by Mat Smart, the final scene, was an anachronistic look at that day through one astronaut's experience – but not one who was actually on the flight. As deftly as Randy Schmeling delivered on the engaging script as the main character, the story line didn't quite anchor the weight of that historic event.

Peluso's work as the cohesive element was critical to the success and entertainment value of this show. He not only deftly incorporated a style of theater completely in keeping with the period, (with the ensemble in multiple arrangements on metal scaffolding) but he bridged the gaps and provided necessary light-hearted relief from the heavy drama of some of the scenes. His timeline really polished off the rough edges and pulled the idea into one whole.

*1968* runs through February 19. Note that the performances are at the History Center of Minnesota on Kellogg, not the History Theatre in the McNally-Smith building.

Recommended. Baby Boomers, bring your children and older grandchildren and you could set up a great conversation with them about your own experiences in this era.