



[Home](#)

[Now Playing](#)

[Coming Soon](#)

[Half-Price Tickets](#)

[Search](#)

[Theatre Map](#)

[Children's Shows](#)

[Performance Spotlight](#)

[Review Round-Up](#)

[Videos](#)

[Photo Gallery](#)

[About Us](#)

Quick Search

--Show or Theatre-- ▼

Go

OR

Search by date:

mm/dd/yy



Go

[Top Rated Plays](#)

[Broadway In Chicago](#)

[Opening Night Calendar](#)

[Theatre News Wire](#)

[Seating Charts](#)

[Restaurant Guide](#)

[Auditions](#)

[Holiday Plays](#)

[Theatre In LA](#)

[Theatre In New York](#)

[Theatre In Atlanta](#)

[Theatre In Boston](#)

Packing at Theater Wit

Packing

[Theater Wit](#)

1229 W Belmont Ave Chicago

Half of discovering who you are is finding where you belong. PACKING, a solo performance from writer/performer Scott Bradley (Alien Queen, Carpenters Halloween, We Three Lizas), is the tale of a genderqueer vagabond leaving small-town Iowa on a three-decade long odyssey, continually reinventing himself through new identities across multiple cities. His journey captures a snapshot of recent history through personal accounts of assaults, addictions, the plague years of the AIDS crisis and the fight for marriage equality. Combining personal memoir, historical record, popular music, and ancestral frontier stories, Bradley's story illuminates the deeply personal LGBTQ struggles too-often erased from U.S. history.

[Presented by About Face Theatre](#)

Thru - Dec 7, 2019



Price: \$20-\$38

Show Type: Drama

Box Office: 773-975-8150

Running Time: 1hr, 30mins

www.aboutfacetheatre.com

Packing Reviews

Average Rating based on 11 reviews



Highly Recommended

Highly Recommended



Recommended



Somewhat Recommended



Not Recommended





(<https://chicagoonstage.com/>)

Home (<https://chicagoonstage.com/>) Who Are We? (<https://chicagoonstage.com/mark-osing/>)

ChicagoOnStage (<https://chicagoonstage.com/theatre/reviews/>) USAOnStage (<https://chicagoonstage.com/theatre/national/>)

Blog (<https://chicagoonstage.com/blog/>) FAQ / Calendar (<https://chicagoonstage.com/faq/>) Contact Us (<https://chicagoonstage.com/contact-us/>)

CHICAGO REVIEWS (<https://chicagoonstage.com/theatre/reviews/>)

"Packing" takes us through the last 50 years of gay history in a devastating one-man show

POSTED NOVEMBER 11, 2019 (<https://chicagoonstage.com/packing-takes-us-through-the-last-50-years-of-gay-history-in-a-devastating-one-man-show/>). [KAREN TOPHAM](https://chicagoonstage.com/author/dramagirl/) (<https://chicagoonstage.com/author/dramagirl/>).



Review by Karen Topham, ChicagoOnstage, member American Theatre Critics Association. Photo by Cody Jolly Photography.



From the opening image of amber waves of grain projected onto its floor, Scott Bradley's solo show *Packing* is pretty much a gay Americana play. During this 90-minute monologue, we watch through the eyes of a frequently broken and lost soul moving across the country and back again while the last fifty years of gay history unfold around him, affecting his life and the lives of millions of others. Under the sensitive direction of Victory Garden's Chay Yew, this initial production of About Face Theatre's 24th season is riveting, powerful, poignant, and at times utterly devastating.



<https://chicagoonstage.com/>

play. During this 90-minute monologue, we watch through the eyes of a frequently broken and lost soul moving across

[Home \(https://chicagoonstage.com/\)](https://chicagoonstage.com/)

[Who Are We? \(https://chicagoonstage.com/mark-schier/\)](https://chicagoonstage.com/mark-schier/)

[Chicago On Stage \(https://chicagoonstage.com/theatre/reviews/\)](https://chicagoonstage.com/theatre/reviews/)

[USA On Stage \(https://chicagoonstage.com/theatre/national/\)](https://chicagoonstage.com/theatre/national/)

[Blog \(https://chicagoonstage.com/blog/\)](https://chicagoonstage.com/blog/)

[FAQ / Calendar \(https://chicagoonstage.com/faq/\)](https://chicagoonstage.com/faq/)

[Contact Us \(https://chicagoonstage.com/contact-us/\)](https://chicagoonstage.com/contact-us/)

Bradley, a writer, actor, and director, delivers an engaging, utterly raw performance as he takes us through the events that helped to shape his life, for better or for worse. He begins with his childhood in Iowa, where the gay, genderqueer boy faced derision from his alcoholic father as well as from the kids who surrounded him as he gingerly tested the waters of his homosexuality with other teens who were embarrassed by their orientations. His mother, having divorced, remarried a man who at first appeared sweet but quickly became abusive, and Scott was the target of a lot of his bile. In a fit of self-loathing, he sought therapy, only to end up sharing his secrets with a member of a fundamentalist church who warned him that hell was waiting for him if he did not change his sinful ways. This began what became a lifelong series of reinventions designed to help him to fit in better, none of which ever worked for very long.

Yew and Bradley, with the help of impressive projections from Stephen Mazurak and complex sound design by Eric Backus, tell this story as it weaves its way through the years of the AIDS crisis. Bradley moves from Iowa to New York to Seattle to Arizona to New York to Washington, DC, again to Chicago and back to Iowa in his never-ending search for a way to quiet the powerful, jeering voice in his head telling him he is worthless and to stop what he refers to as “glitches” from happening within his brain. At some point, he discovers that he can shut down both the voice and the glitches through alcohol and drugs, and these twin poisons end up taking over his life.

Interestingly, though the closeted gay, effeminate boy becomes an openly gay, effeminate actor living in mostly urban locations, the two most important things in his life are a pair of antique rifles: his grandmother’s squirrel gun, which she left to him when she moved into a home, and the consistent mental image of the musket his grandfather informed him was used in the Civil War by one of his ancestors, a symbol of the kind of frontier stock from whom he descended. These guns, each reflecting a lifestyle that could not be more opposite to the one he lives, might be the only pleasant memories he has of a childhood spent hiding in despair, though the voice in his head tells him that he has not earned the right to own them at all.

Bradley’s story is one of a person who has survived a lot, sometimes by the skin of his teeth. Throughout his performance, he bares his life with such honesty and emotion that, though he is painting a harrowing picture of a self-destructive man squandering chance after chance, we feel deeply for him. Somehow he gets through it all, right? He *is* here showing us his story, after all. But such is the powerful grip that story has on the audience that we hurt for him and worry about him anyway, especially as he narrates moments like a frightening assault by a group of erstwhile friends.

Packing is the kind of piece that will linger long after the audience leaves the theatre. Whether you are gay or straight, whether or not you have your own memories of the events Bradley describes, you will leave with this story under your skin. The man sitting next to me, who had seen the original workshop of the play, drove all the way from southeast Iowa just to see this production, and he was heading home when it was over. I asked if it was as good the second time, and he said, “Better.” Both the smile on his face and the trace of tears in his eyes loudly proclaimed that the trip was well worth the time and effort. Since you will certainly have a less exhausting journey, I’m sure it will be worth yours as well.

Packing is an About Face Theatre production now playing at Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont, Chicago, IL, until Dec 7. The show runs 90 minutes; there is no intermission. Check the website (<http://aboutfacetheatre.com/>) for specific dates, times, and tickets. Find more information about current plays in our front page recs and [at theatreinchicago.com](http://theatreinchicago.com/) (<http://theatreinchicago.com/>).



(<https://www.chicagotheatrereview.com>).

ABOUT (<https://www.chicagotheatrereview.com/about/>)

REVIEWS (<https://www.chicagotheatrereview.com/category/news-reviews/reviews/>)

NEWS (<https://www.chicagotheatrereview.com/category/news-reviews/news/>)

CHICAGO THEATRE REVIEW

An Overstuffed Suitcase of Memories

[theatredude](https://www.chicagotheatrereview.com/author/theatredude/) (<https://www.chicagotheatrereview.com/author/theatredude/>) November 8, 2019
<https://www.chicagotheatrereview.com/2019/11/> [Reviews](https://www.chicagotheatrereview.com/category/news-reviews/reviews/) (<https://www.chicagotheatrereview.com/category/news-reviews/reviews/>) Comments Off



(<https://io.wp.com/www.chicagotheatrereview.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/AFT-Packing-8041.jpeg?fit=640%2C427&ssl=1>).

Packing – About Face Theatre

Each of us have lived lives that are filled with significant situations, emotional events and meaningful memories. If we all possessed an eloquent gift for writing, as well as a talent for emotionally honest storytelling, any one of us could probably condense our childhood, adolescence and early adult years into a 90 minute narrative, like this. But few would be as captivating at sharing his life story as Scott Bradley. Performing alone on a simple, white square platform, which sometimes serves as a blank canvas for Stephen Mazurek's colorful and evocative projection artwork, Mr. Bradley opens his heart and bares his soul in this incredibly moving solo performance of disco and survival.

RECOMMENDED SITES



(<http://www.theatreinchicago.com>)



Scott Bradley has come a long way. Today he wears many hats. Not only a talented actor and playwright, he's a gifted and empathetic educator, performer and director. Chicago audiences may recall his off-the-wall genderqueer-rock-puppet-spectacles of "Alien Queen," "The Carpenters Halloween," "Mollywood" and "Tran: The Atari Musical." His wacky holiday musical fantasy, "We Three Lizas," which premiered a few years ago at About Face Theatre, was later revised and reprised a couple years later, to great delight. In addition to About Face, Scott's work has been enjoyed at The Hyperites, Walkabout Theatre, Hell in a Handbag, Bailiwick Repertory and

many other venues. In short, this isn't Scott Bradley's first rodeo.

Mr. Bradley unpacks his overstuffed suitcase of memories, removing each episode from his life, piece-by-piece, as if they were treasured articles of clothing. Some recollections evoke warm feelings of nostalgia; others are painful and stinging. And, of course, Scott plays himself, which is far more difficult and challenging than theatergoers may think. He spends the next hour-and-a-half taking us on a detailed journey that is his life story. It's a tale filled to the brim with freaky flashbacks, harrowing and hurtful years of torture, inspirational life lessons and the constant drive to rise above the odds and survive.

Scott's life, so far, plays out over years of moving from place to place. He begins his life in rural Iowa during the late 1960's. Balancing the nurturing and love given by his mother and grandma, with great pain and revilement from others, Bradley struggles to find himself. Before he admits that he's gay, young Scott endures years of physical and emotional abuse, sometimes at the hands of his father and stepfather, but more often from his own peers and adults in positions of authority.

Always packing, unpacking and repacking his feelings, along with his belongings, Bradley finds himself relocating all over the country. Sometimes he's with his family; at other times all by himself. He even wins a scholarship to attend drama school in England, where he's finally accepted as a gay artist. Scott lived off-and-on in Seattle, where he became addicted to booze and hard drugs. There he eventually found the man he'll love forever and together they relocated to Chicago. But, at the center of this stirring narrative, we meet a man who's always discovering and learning things about himself, while forever moving and packing.



Skillfully directed with sensitivity and artistry by Chay Yew, the esteemed artistic director of Victory Gardens, Scott Bradley is wonderful in this solo performance. He paints a colorful self-portrait of a talented, caring human being who simply wants to be loved, recognized for his skills and accepted for who he is. In this touching, heartfelt, honest and often humorous performance, Mr. Bradley bares his soul and shows us that he's Everyman. He's just like every one of us, in so many ways. Thus, this incredible solo performance taps into our own hearts and souls and leaves us enlightened, as well as entertained.

Highly Recommended

Reviewed by Colin Douglas

Presented October 31-December 7 by About Face Theatre at Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont Ave., Chicago.

Tickets are available in person at the box office, by calling 773-975-8150 or by going to www.aboutfacetheatre.com (<http://www.aboutfacetheatre.com/>).

Additional information about this and other area productions can be found by visiting www.theatreinchicago.com (<http://www.theatreinchicago.com/>).

0 COMMENTS

Comments are closed.

Select Location ▼

≡ SECTIONS

About Face Theatre presents PACKING Review: Stunningly Honest Storytelling

Posted on November 8, 2019 by [Lauren Katz](#)

Click here to read more Picture This Post [About Face Theatre](#) stories.



Scott Bradley in PACKING

CODY JOLLY PHOTOGRAPHY

"Half of discovering who you are is finding where you belong."

About Face Theatre features the above line in their marketing materials for this world premiere. It offers the perfect introduction to what audiences are about to see. Solo Performer Scott Bradley invites us to experience his story. His story is not easy. It is a prime example of the work and hardship, though also hope, that can be inescapably connected to self-discovery.

About Face Theatre presents World Premiere of *Packing*

Written and performed by About Face Theatre Artistic Associate Scott Bradley, *Packing* is a solo, auto-biographical performance. We take a journey with him back in time – reaching back to his childhood in Iowa, traveling through his challenging post-college years in New York and Seattle, and ending finally in the present. Bradley's story travels the hardships of assaults, addictions, the plague of the AIDS crisis, as well as the fight for marriage equality – exposing the audience to a tough, but important history. Directed by Victory Gardens Artistic Director Chay Yew, the play is deeply personal, and makes for an emotional roller coaster of a ride from start to finish.



Scott Bradley in PACKING

CODY JOLLY PHOTOGRAPHY

We learn of his father's gambling and drinking addiction early in the play. This led his father's unexpected need to pick up and leave the family home. It is also when we learn of Bradley's inner demons – a voice that constantly haunts him, reminding of his failures. He is only eight in this moment of darkness and fear. The voice of his demons chase him and taunt him. He believes he is a burden on his family, and deserves to be left alone. Yew creates this effect through a microphone that projects Bradley's voice throughout the space-- creating an image of Bradley and his inner demons being the same. The voice comes back at multiple points throughout the piece. Each time we see Bradley put himself down. We see how this impacts his identity in the moment. We are overcome with heartbreak.

Clever Design

The production design is simple, allowing the majority of the focus to fall on Bradley and his performance. Yew personally designed the set. It consists of little more than a chair and a projection screen that acts as the floor. Whenever Bradley moves to a different location or key moment in the story, he brings the chair along with him. The floor often changes to a new projection beneath. This collaboration between Yew and Projections Designer Stephan Mazurek, in this writer's view, creates a useful convention that helps us move with Bradley, from moment to moment.



Scott Bradley in PACKING

CODY JOLLY PHOTOGRAPHY

The story takes us to Bradley's early teenage years – the year he discovered disco. He had difficulty overcoming bullying and ridicule at school, but found comfort in dance lessons, and the friends he made in bringing that expertise to school dances. As Bradley describes the transition and dances about the stage, Mazurek and Lighting Designer Lee Fiskness fill the space with bright, technicolor light, and flashing cubes of color on the screen below. Sound Designer and Composer Eric Backus fills the stage with popular disco music. You too may feel it as an invitation to dance along with the performer. In this writer's view, this stagecraft helps highlight moments of celebration and release that help counter the hardship in Bradley's story. It was not only the mocking he endured at school. At home he had to endure a broken and abusive family.

Yew and Bradley create a performance that is deeply heartfelt and personal. While the story is not always easy to swallow, Bradley connects with us closely. There is very little distance between us and Bradley. We are in an intimate space in which we are not simply observing. Rather, we almost become a character and confidante.

The opening night audience seemed all in-- ready to lean into whatever twist and turn came next in the journey. Bradley does not hold back. The story is not always uplifting. He allows us to witness that side of him. We also share in the pain that the hardships he faced clearly caused.



Scott Bradley in PACKING

CODY JOLLY PHOTOGRAPHY



Scott Bradley in PACKING

CODY JOLLY PHOTOGRAPHY

Full of honesty and triumph, *Packing* is must-see. Yew and Bradley's collaboration creates an experience that this writer certainly has not stopped thinking about since.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Note: This is now added to the Picture this Post round up of BEST PLAYS IN CHICAGO, where it will remain until the end of the run. [Click here to read – Top Picks for Theater in Chicago NOW – Chicago Plays PICTURE THIS POST Loves.](#)

Chicago Best Plays November, 2019



PACKING

Written and performed by AFT Artistic Associate Scott Bradley

Directed: by Chay Yew

Click here to read more Picture This Post [About Face Theatre](#) stories.

When

Running through December 7, 2019

Thursdays at 7:30pm

Fridays at 7:30pm

Saturdays at 7:30pm

Sundays at 3:00pm

Tickets:

\$20+

Check for Half-Price Deals from Hot Tix:

Where

Theater Wit
1229 W. Belmont Ave
Chicago, IL 60657



For full-priced tickets and ticket availability visit the [About Face Theatre](#) website, or call 773-975-8150.

Photos: Cody Jolly Photography

Note: Picture This Post reviews are excerpted by [Theatre in Chicago](#)

About the Author:



Lauren Katz is a freelance director and dramaturge, and new to the Chicago Theatre Scene. She recently moved from Washington DC, where she worked with Mosaic Theater Company of DC in Company Management, as well as directed around town with various theaters.

Click here to read more [Picture this Post stories by Lauren Katz](#).

Share this:

2

Make a Comment

THE VOICE OF CHICAGO'S GAY, LESBIAN, BI, TRANS AND QUEER COMMUNITY SINCE 1985

Home, Search, Facebook, Twitter, Email icons

Search News

ABOUT WCMG PUBLICATIONS NEWS INDEX ENTERTAINMENT FEATURES BARS & CLUBS CALENDAR VIDEOS ADVERTISERS OUT! GUIDE

Evanston Subaru

SUBARU

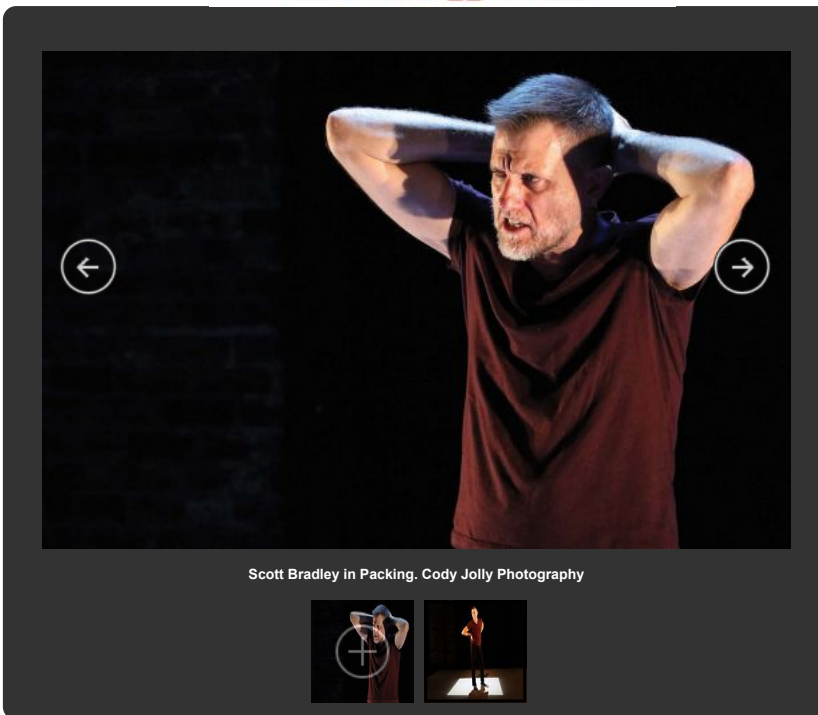


LGBTQ HEALTHCARE CITYWIDE

Howard Brown Health

WINDY CITY TIMES

THEATER REVIEW Packing
by Scott C. Morgan, Windy City Times
2019-11-13



Playwright: Scott Bradley

At: About Face Theatre at Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont Ave. Tickets: 773-975-8150 or AboutFaceTheatre.com; \$20-\$38. Runs through Dec. 7

There's so much to unpack in Packing. Scott Bradley's searing autobiographical monologue, now receiving a sterling world premiere courtesy of About Face Theatre and director Chay Yew, is a heart-wrenching journey of a gay man searching for a sense of self and of home.

Bradley is mostly known around Chicago as one half of The Scooty & Jo-Jo Show, or from his campy pop-cultural musical comedy mashups like Alien Queen, Carpenters Halloween or We Three Lizas.

Packing is a complete change as Bradley reveals, often with unflinching detail, his many life struggles.

Bradley begins with his often traumatic childhood at age 3 in 1969 Iowa. There are happy memories about riding a pony and meeting with grandparents who boast about their special rifles (likely part of the reason why the show is called Packing).

Yet those chipper anecdotes get subsumed by Bradley's mother's unfair post-partum guilt. There's also his father's dangerous alcoholism and gambling, plus terrible bullying in school.

Like so many gay men, Bradley finds a safe haven away from his worries with pop culture. There's a Flip Wilson-inspired ventriloquist dummy, a devotion to disco dancing, plus lots of Cher adoration.

But the salve of entertainment and performing can only go so far, as Bradley (and Yew with sound designer Eric Backus) reveal a debilitating "glitch" within his head. It recurs and trips Bradley up whenever the outside and inner-voices get the better of him.

OUT

CHICAGO ILLINOIS LGBTQ VISITOR'S GUIDE

TRENDING BREAKING

- ▶ [NATIONAL PrEP access, candidate Petras, abandoned son](#)
- ▶ [SHOWBIZ Neil Patrick Harris, M. Blige, Jane Lynch, Pet Shop Boys](#)
- ▶ [WINDY CITY TIMES annual Holiday Guide, Part Two](#)
- ▶ [ELECTIONS 2020 Marianne Williamson talks LGBT rights, presidential bid](#)
- ▶ [NATIONAL Blind trans woman at Pantene ad, judges, Grindr crimes](#)

BLUEBEARD
CHICAGO'S HOLIDAY LEGEND
LIMITED RUN DEC. 13-27

ABD
ACHILLE BENKO & DUVAL
BUSINESS SERVICES AND CPAs
www.abd-cpas.com • (847) 257-7330

LOVE YOUR WEBSITE .COM

opendoor
Health Center of Illinois
primarymedical & behavioralhealth
HIV & STcare
odhcil.org

Packing allows Bradley to share and analyze his life's journey to find himself emotionally and artistically. What's also so invaluable about it is that Bradley's life can be seen within a much larger LGBTQ historical context. Packing works for those who lived alongside similar historical traumas (like the height of the AIDS crisis), and for later generations so they can get a sense of what their elders endured in the push for so many more freedoms.

As a performer, Bradley keeps things breezy with lots of humor, so Packing isn't solely a depress-fest. But he's also able to access the past pain and palpably relive it in the moment.

Bradley is also aided with great technology to tell his tale. Projection designer Stephen Mazurak and lighting designer Lee Fiskness illustrate Packing from above onto the stage floor with great atmospheric videos and saturated color.

With Packing, Bradley reveals a serious side to himself that is therapeutic for himself and everyone else along for the ride. It's a personally brave and fulfilling story that deserves to be seen.



Windy City Media Group does not approve or necessarily agree with the views posted below.

Please do not post letters to the editor here. Please also be civil in your dialogue.

If you need to be mean, just know that the longer you stay on this page, the more you help us.

0 Comments

Sort by Oldest

Add a comment...

[Facebook Comments Plugin](#)

ARTICLES YOU MIGHT LIKE



▶ [Matt Rodin, Bethany Thomas star in Milwaukee production of Hedwig 2019-12-18](#) - December 18, 2019 — (Milwaukee) Milwaukee Repertory Theater is pleased to announce complete cast and creative team for the much anticipated ...



▶ [THEATER REVIEW Working 2019-12-18](#) - **Playwright: Book by Stephen Schwartz and Nina Faso, music and lyrics by Schwartz and others, including James Taylor and Lin-Manuel Miranda At: Theo ...**



▶ [World Premiere of The Tasters coming to Rivendell Theatre 2019-12-17](#) - Chicago, IL—Rivendell Theatre Ensemble (RTE), Chicago's only Equity theatre dedicated to producing new work with women at the core, presents the ...



▶ [Sideshow names new executive director 2019-12-16](#) - Sideshow Theatre Company announced the appointment of Brian Pastor as its new executive director, effective this month. Pastor succeeds Stephanie Weddell, who ...



▶ ['Burning Bluebeard' running through Dec. 27 2019-12-16](#) - Porchlight Music Theatre is running The Ruffians' Burning Bluebeard, making its downtown debut at The Ruth Page Center for the Arts, 1016 N. ...



Saturday, 09 November 2019 17:34

REVIEW: ABOUT FACE'S 'PACKING' AT THEATER WIT

Written by John Accrocco



Scott Bradley in 'Packing' at Theater Wit

Photo by Cody Jolly Photography

Scott Bradley is an institution within the Chicago theater community. His quirky, campy musical versions of old horror movies have been sell-out hits around town for years. Which is what makes “Packing” all the more interesting. He instead turns the spotlight on himself. About Face borrows Victory Gardens artistic director Chay Yew to direct Scott Bradley’s one-man confessional.

In “Packing” Bradley moves away from the puppets and classic rock and opens his own life up to a 90-minute journey through the turbulent AIDS-era gay life. First and foremost, this is incredibly brave for someone as well-known as Scott, many colleagues are likely to see About Face’s premiere. Bradley is not afraid to expose every aspect of his life from physical abuse to addiction and failure. That might all sound like a bummer but Bradley’s inviting narrative style is humorous and relatable. And of course, it’s all tied to together with various pop culture influences.

“Packing” is Bradley’s life story, but it’s also the collective legacy of the midwestern gay experience. A reminder of how far the LGBT community has come in the past three decades. Bradley stands alone on a stark stage and begins his story at the age he began to understand he was different. His childhood is

rather unhappy, but his delivery makes it seem as if he's the only who doesn't know how traumatic his home life was. As he grows up, the story becomes more familiar. The far reaches of the Midwest can be an unaccepting place and that sent many LGBT people to the cities to seek acceptance. Not only acceptance of the LGBT lifestyle, but acceptance of the creative lifestyle.

Bradley's heartbreaking failures changed the course of his life in ways that few can predict when they're in the pits of despair. His struggles with drug addiction and alcohol dependence and his explanation for why he turned to substances to quiet the critical voices in his head are all too real. Many people in the LGBT community struggle with substance abuse and non-traditional societal norms can sometimes perpetuate cycles of addiction. His stories aren't just his stories, they're all of our stories.

It's hard to imagine anyone else portraying Scott Bradley but Scott Bradley. His performance style is at times frantic, but always warm and authentic. He takes an audience in his arms and let's them know that it's okay to fail. He doesn't ask an audience for approval, but rather to say if you're struggling, you're not alone. Chay Yew helps draw out Bradley's vulnerability through a variety of pseudo-characters; Bradley at various ages of his life. Yew also designed the set, though sparse, is effective. The pop cultural cannon that inspired Bradley is playfully cast on the floor of the stage rather than the backdrop. An interesting visual twist.

"Packing" is a journey of self-acceptance through an era that was less gay friendly. It's Scott Bradley exposing his storied life in order to help anyone who finds themselves in the same boat. It's a theater experience that gives voice to anyone who fled small town roots in order to find themselves.

Through December 7th at About Face theater - Theater Wit. 1229 W Belmont Ave. 773-975-8150

[Tweet](#)[Like 0](#)[Share](#)

John Accrocco

Newsletters

Follow us



Mobile

 **Scott Bradley** / View Profile / Edit Profile / Log Out

Search chicagoreader.com

GO

READER

ARTS
& CULTURE

ARTS & CULTURE | THEATER REVIEW

November 12, 2019

Like 52

Tweet

REPRINTS

 Share

Packing follows one gay man's journey to confront his midwestern ghosts

Scott Bradley's solo show for About Face creates an important document of queer life.

By Dan Jakes  @DanEJakes

Sign up for our newsletters

 Subscribe

click to enlarge

*Packing*

CODY JOLLY PHOTOGRAPHY



52



Living out and proud in a coastal queer mecca full of historic gayborhoods, vocally supportive senators, and Hamburger Mary's locations is one thing; learning to love yourself in rural America can be another. For writer and performer Scott Bradley, embracing himself and his upbringing after returning as an adult to his roots in Iowa (he attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop) meant reckoning with the ghosts and self-doubts from which he thought he'd long escaped.

Directed by Chay Yew, Bradley's autobiographical 90-minute solo work *Packing* hits a lot of notes that will ring familiar to audiences of LGBT theater: there's a neglectful and abusive father who resents his son's gait and mannerisms, a sexual awakening wrapped in shame, a brief refuge in the highs of a risky party scene, and the sobering chill of surviving an epidemic. But the ubiquitousness of the elements of Bradley's journey isn't a negative here. Instead, when paired with deeply personal, vivid memories of his coming of age—like the euphoria of his first Cher concert or the joy he felt the first time a disclosure of his sexuality was met with a shrug instead of a panic—Bradley and About Face Theatre create an important document of queer life only a decade or two in the past but a world away culturally.

I was reminded throughout of Steven Strafford's *Methtacular!*, also presented by About Face a few years ago, which touched on similar serious themes and used comedy to make harrowing plot points more cutting or palatable. A bit more humor here would serve Bradley's often painful story well, but the warmth expressed in his acceptance and love for his midwestern home is undeniable. 🏳️‍🌈

[More Theater Review »](#)

Tags: Theater Review, Packing, About Face Theatre, Scott Bradley, Chay Yew, Steven Strafford, Recommended

Like 52

[Tweet](#)

[REPRINTS](#)

[Share](#)

RELATED STORIES



20/20 celebrates being young, gifted, and queer

About Face Youth Theatre turns 20 with this contemporary look at LGBTQ history.

by Albert Williams

[Reviews: Film/Theater - NYC, LA, SF, Chicago – Stage and Cinema](#)

Theater Review: PACKING (About Face Theatre at Theater Wit in Chicago)



by [Lawrence Bommer](#) on November 8, 2019

in [Theater-Chicago](#)

PICKED, PECKED, AND PACKED

Some solo shows can be valued simply for their superb simulations of someone else's story. Others succeed because we pay extra special attention when the chronicler actually experienced what they're sharing. *Packing*, an About Face Theatre world premiere by and from Chicago theater artist Scott Bradley, has the best of both breeds of one-person plays. As they say, "he's been there and sent back postcards" and Bradley tells his trauma with pizzazz as much as precision.



In 90 minutes expertly choreographed by Victory Gardens artistic director Chay Yew, the 53-year-old Bradley performs on a stage covered with Stephan Mazurek's potent projections and Lee Fiskness's pulsating lighting quadrants, employing as props just two family muskets (hence the title).



The thrust here is Bradley's lacerating self-history, a tissue of truths that spares him and us no confession of self-doubt, suicidal longings, and resistance to repression. Growing up gay in Iowa brought an eviscerating combination of enthralling natural backdrops and terrible human ones.



Religion ironically provides a seeming shelter from the human storm. Then there are those saving moments of sheer serendipity: A seminal happening comes at the Iowa State Fair where this lavender lad enjoys the all-defining delight of having Cher herself sing right to him.



Nonetheless, because of something as natural as the way he walks, Bradley makes enemies he never knew he had. He finds himself plagued by an inner "voice" that prophesies doom and cautions surrender.



However familiar Bradley's painfully detailed examples of homophobia and taunts from the haters who wanted to "fix" him, Bradley reinvents the terror of gratuitous smears, the failure of a drunkard dad to offer any security, and the helplessness of his mom to allay the "glitches" that plague her boy. His recounting a hate crime in a cattle barn is nightmare central.



Coming out is complicated, especially just as AIDS fears and fatalities — one almost as devastating as the other — take away friends right and left. A trip to Hull, England where he begins to hone his passion for plays provides a solace and distraction. Always, Bradley works on "keeping busy to keep the glitches at bay."



It's better t

Ad Changing
auto with Alls

Allstate

Quote Now

Back in the states, this "genderqueer vagabond" and "hot mess," who wonders if he has the right to be happy, acts out more "glitches." The ex-disco bunny erupts with kinky sex, drug taking that goes beyond experimentation to addiction, and an ugly habit of "using" older boyfriends. This plays out in the Capitol Hill section of Seattle and New York City's "gayborhoods," with a foray to Arizona. The tortured trek finally leads to Chicago, where Bradley gets caught up in more than a few theatrical triumphs with Hell in a Handbag Productions and About Face Theatre, like his invigorating romp *We Three Lizas*.

Packing comes full circle as Bradley returns to Iowa, a former hotbed of bigotry that has grown up like him. He's accompanied by his once boyfriend and future husband "Cowboy." The glitches finally die. No more need to reinvent what was never broken.

We're with him every step of a journey worth taking.

photos by Cody Jolly Photography

Packing

About Face Theatre

Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont Ave.

Thurs-Sat at 7:30 (dark Nov 28); Sun at 3; Sat at 3 (Nov 30)

ends on December 7, 2019

for tickets, call 773.975.8150 or visit [About Face](#)

for more shows, visit [Theatre in Chicago](#)



9



0



9

Like 3

Leave a Comment

 Name * E-mail * Website

- [Home](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [CD-DVD](#)
- [Dance](#)
- [Film](#)
- [Interviews](#)
- [Music](#)
- [Theater-Chicago](#)
- [Theater-Las Vegas](#)
- [Theater-Los Angeles](#)
- [Theater-New York](#)
- [Theater-Regional](#)
- [Theater-San Francisco / Bay Area](#)
- [Tours](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Privacy Statement](#)

WELCOME

WEST END REVIEWS

OFF WEST END REVIEWS

FRINGE REVIEWS

REGIONAL REVIEWS

OVERSEAS Reviews

WHAT'S COMING London

THEATREWORLD INTERNET MAGAZINE



Editor: Terry Whittaker - Sub-editor: Graham Powner



SCOTT BRADLEY'S ONE-MAN SHOW *PACKING* IS A MOVING PORTRAIT OF A MAN BRAVE ENOUGH TO FIND STRENGTH IN THE DARKEST PLACES

Scott Bradley's Packing teaser trailer



Usually I am not a fan of one-man shows, unless the “man” or “person” is someone exciting like Kathleen Turner. However, I knew that the world premiere of Scott Bradley's *Packing* was going to defy my rule. It's directed by Chay Yew, Artistic Director of the Victory Gardens Theatre. He's revolutionized the Victory Gardens and brought exciting and thought provoking work to its stage with renown performers and stories of struggles from around the world. He chooses work that entertains, enlightens and educates. Now he's in collaboration with About Face Theatre Artistic Associate Scott Bradley, is the artfully told, breathtaking life story touted as a “journey of self-discovery as it intersects with recent Queer history.” *Packing* moves from Bradley's early life in the sun-drenched, pristine cornfields of God-fearing Iowa to the tolerant independence and simultaneously community of the vibrant Chicago art world.

If what doesn't kill us makes us stronger, Scott Bradley is a man of steel. He could make Lou Ferrigno cower in a game of arm-wrestling. He tells his story with little artifice of costume or set. Instead, he stands upon a stage lit from underneath with projections that illustrate where he is on the dateline. He reveals throughout the 90 minutes how he has had to rise above his turbulent past to be who he is today. The story is frightening, provocative and cruel, but no matter how bad it gets, he never lets the audience feel sorry for him. He moves along mostly fleeing pain and suffering from the time he was a small child. He brings the audience along with him to a place that is safe, productive and healthy.

The phenomenal thing about this story is that he had no one to help him. He was alone from the time his mother told him that his baby sister died stillborn because giving birth to him reduced the strength of her stomach muscles. She told him it wasn't his fault, but he still had to live with her burden and sadness. His father



was an even bigger piece of work. He was never around and then one day just left him in a gas station in a snowstorm (viscerally recreated by sound designer Eric Backus). He called his grandmother "Grandma Hell." The good thing about his childhood and near-role model, was his grandfather who came as close to loving him as possible in this family. He was a fun, crusty old man who would always get him into an imaginary gunfight and ask him if he was "packing." He even left him the family musket.

His mother finally cheered up enough to move on and met another man and they had to pack up and move. They had a few more kids but new daddy was abusive and angry. When it became clear that young Scott was more interested in Cher than football, all hell broke loose at home. School was a living hell for Scott, not only was he the new kid, but he was maligned, alienated and brutally beaten. Finally he found a way to move away from home and started making friends and meeting people that had similar struggles. After years of battling low self-esteem, alcoholism and loneliness, he met someone he loved, wound up in Chicago and went on to have a career and success as a writer/performer. His work includes *Alien Queen*, *Carpenters Halloween* and the Christmas show *We Three Lizas*.

Reliving Scott Bradley's story is a great way to kick off the holiday season, the triumphant story of a person who, with everything he has, demands all that life has to offer and demands that he be free from suffering, self-pity and narrow-mindedness. Although he speaks of experiencing crippling loneliness and isolation, a depth of humiliation that is unfathomable, he never lost his footing on the ladder of success. His story is an iconic inspiration to anyone who thinks they "just can't take it anymore." He is living proof that there's always a better day ahead.

Packing runs through December 7 at Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont. Tickets can be purchased at aboutfacetheatre.com or by phoning 773-975-8150. Tickets run from \$20-\$38 with discounts available for veterans, seniors and groups of 10 or more.

Review by Ruth Smerling

PACKING Theater Wit through December 7, 2019

THEATER WIT

1229 W. Belmont Avenue

Chicago

IL 60657

773-975-8150 or visit

www.theaterwit.org

THE BROADWAY BLOG



[BUZZ](#) [REVIEWS](#) [SHOW FOLK](#) [HOT TICKET](#) [THEATER BUFF](#) [BEYOND BROADWAY](#) [ABOUT US](#)

[Home](#) > [Beyond Broadway](#) > [‘Packing’ – An Odyssey of Reinvention and Self-Discovery](#)

[BEYOND BROADWAY](#) ◇ [REVIEWS](#)

‘PACKING’ – AN ODYSSEY OF REINVENTION AND SELF-DISCOVERY



Scott Bradley in ‘Packing.’ (Photo: Cody Jolly Photography)

by Lauren Emily Whalen

Packing begins and ends with a gun – but not necessarily in the way you’d think.

Playwright-performer Scott Bradley grew up in Iowa and Colorado, riding horses and soaking up the great outdoors. He loved Cher and disco dancing as much as he loved his homeland and survived a home life that was shaky at best, including a perennial inner monologue that never failed to remind him that he wasn’t good enough.

Through it all, Bradley held onto his grandmother’s squirrel gun: a talisman that always made the older woman feel safe, bequeathed to her grandson upon her death. *Packing* is Bradley’s solo tale of surviving and thriving as a genderqueer artist still coping with childhood trauma. Many queer people have complex relationships with home and family, and *Packing* beautifully illustrates this while highlighting all that’s unique about Bradley’s journey.

On opening night of *Packing*, the most prevalent sound in the crowd was a “huh” of recognition. As a young child, Bradley experienced family discord from the get-go: a depressed mother who’d lost a child and blamed him for it, and an occasionally



absent father who drank to excess. Bradley found comfort in colorful clothing and disco but was forced to endure severe bullying from intolerant classmates and an abusive stepfather.

When Bradley studied in London as an undergraduate, he found an accepting community for the first time in his life but was terrified of having sex due to the AIDS epidemic. As he bounced from New York to Seattle to Chicago, now dealing with his own addiction while finding solace in the theater, Bradley sought out a sense of home: something he'd felt as a child in the Iowa pastures but hadn't fully experienced since.



Scott Bradley in 'Packing.' (Photo: Cody Jolly Photography)

Bradley is no stranger to writing his own material: he's penned musical takes on *Halloween* for Chicago's Hell in a Handbag Productions, and the hilarious holiday hit *We Three Lizas* for About Face, among other works. But until now, his own story hasn't been material for his art. *Packing* seems to come at the right time in Bradley's life: he's lived, lost and loved — now possessing the ability to look back with a sense of wisdom and an understanding that like all of us, is still evolving. Though the show ends on a happy note, Bradley reminds us of the squirrel gun: a symbol of the destruction he's survived that still looms if he doesn't take care of himself.

Packing's evolution began at the prestigious Iowa Playwrights Project and was refined in collaboration with director Chay Yew. Over 90 minutes the audience experiences Bradley's life — from his first Cher

concert at age three to an unexpected introduction to his now-husband. With only a single chair on a bare stage, he talks about abuse, addiction and AIDS in a way that's both funny and deeply refreshing.

Though there's plenty of sadness to be found in life, there's also unabashed joy. Through Bradley and Yew's artistic synergy, *Packing* enables audiences to experience life's most profound moments.

Packing

Theater Wit

1229 W. Belmont Ave., Chicago

Through December 7, 2019

Lauren Emily Whalen is a 2018 alumna of the National Critics Institute and author of the young adult novel *SATELLITE*. Follow her on Twitter at [@laurenemilywri](#).

👍 Like 19

ABOUT FACE THEATRE

PACKING

SCOTT BRADLEY

0 ❤️ | f t g+ p

previous post

Dancing and Conversation During Difficult Times: 'The Michaels'

next post

Optimism With a Call to Action: 'David Byrne's American Utopia'

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE





AGELESS WONDERS: 'HALF
TIME'

June 13, 2018

REVIEW: THE BRIDGES OF
MADISON COUNTY

March 19, 2014



WHERE ARE WE NOW THEATRE
FESTIVAL

April 16, 2018



CATEGORIES

- > Beyond Broadway
- > Buzz
- > Hot Ticket
- > Reviews
- > Show Folk
- > Theater Buff



FACEBOOK



TWITTER



RSS

