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## J CITY Theater's 'State of the Union' Brings Presidential Politics to the Jersey City Stage

By [Elizabeth Gibson](#) • Oct 29th, 2010 • Category: [Arts](#), [Featured](#)



From left to right: Allen Duane as Judge Alexander, Sandy Cockrell as Mary Matthews, Eileen Gaughan as Mrs. Alexander, Kelly Cooper as Grant Matthews.

Just in time for Tuesday's midterm elections, J CITY Theater gets political, kicking off the largest production in its five-year history this weekend: *State of the Union*.

The play, which was written by Russel Crouse and Howard Lindsay, is a fast-paced political piece about novice Republican presidential candidate Grant Matthews (played by Kelly Cooper), whose campaign teaches him about the importance of ethical flexibility. *State of the Union* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1946, and it addresses issues of race, immigration, big business, labor unions and what Matthews calls "silent money."

Executive producer and J CITY co-founder Clay Cockrell says though the piece is more than half a century old, many of the themes remain "fresh and relevant" in modern-day Jersey City. (The script also mentions the dean of Jersey City corruption, Mayor Frank Hague.)

Like in all good political tales, broader questions of human nature hover under the surface in *State of*

*the Union*. The play touches on the intricacies of love, infidelity, honesty and immorality, as Matthews must choose between his wife and mistress, as well as his personal morals and ethically dubious political decisions.

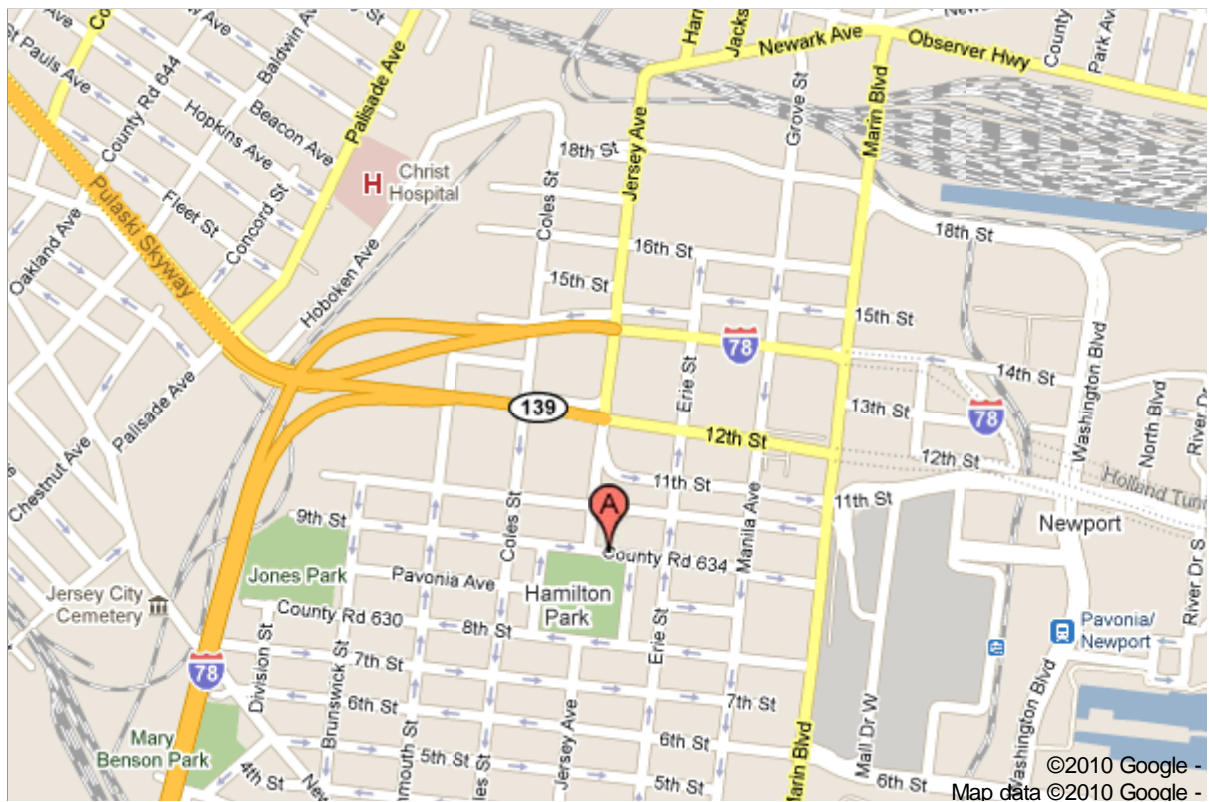
"It is sobering and fascinating to read a [65-year-old] script and realize that we are struggling with the same issues today" says J CITY artistic director Sandy Cockrell. "The mark of truly great storytelling is [its] ability to remain timeless. And of course the story of a man struggling with his own beliefs and integrity is as old as theater itself."

The set and wardrobe are time appropriate: campaign manager Spike MacManus, (played by Kellis Carroll) dons suspenders; Matthews' wife, Mary, drinks martinis ("I'd rather be tight than president!" she proclaims); and the parlor-style hotel room comes equipped with a vintage radio. Although a decade early, the show's look and feel is a touch *Mad Men*, sure to peak your era-obsessed interest. When this reporter dropped by the St. Michael's Church basement this week, the cast (consisting of professional actors including three from Actors' Equity Association, the labor union of American actors) brought a meticulous delivery and gusto to one of the very last of five weeks' worth of rehearsals. Clay says that excellent cast performances have become one of his troupe's trademarks. "If someone comes to see us once, they'll never miss another show," he says.

## THE DETAILS

*State of the Union; The Underground Theater at St. Michael's Church, 252 9th St.; Wednesdays through Saturdays, from October 29 through November 13. Tickets are \$20, and **can be purchased online** or by calling 800-838-3006. (J CITY is encouraging attendees to buy their tickets early, as the last production brought in more theater-goers than seats.)*

**BONUS:** J CITY has partnered with two area restaurants for dinner-and-a-show deals the night you see a performance; you can get 10 percent off at The Hamilton Inn (includes liquor), or \$30 pre-fixe at The Embankment; just mention it to your server.



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**Elizabeth Gibson** is a communications professional with nearly four years' experience in continuing medical education (CME), specifically grant writing. Raised in Allentown, PA, Elizabeth has lived in Jersey City for four years, first in the Heights and then downtown on Grove Street, her current residence. Elizabeth writes freelance for NJ and NY music events and has her own daily music blog, **Music Blog: Name TBD**, as well.

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