

J CITY Theater Kicks Off 5th Season with 'Gun-Shy'

By **Jon Whiten** • Jul 21st, 2010 • Category: **Arts, Featured**



Sandy Cockrell as Evie and Clay Cockrell as Carter in *Gun-Shy*.

Tonight in the basement of St. Michael's Church on 9th Street, J CITY Theater will put on yet another stripped-down and intimate performance as it begins its 5th season with Richard Dresser's *Gun-Shy*, a fast-paced chaotic comedy.

"The story of a divorce gone wrong," is how J CITY co-founder Sandy Cockrell, who directs and plays Evie in *Gun-Shy*, describes the play.

"Evie and Duncan have each found a new love and life moves on — or does it? Coming back together to celebrate their son's birthday, they find themselves snowbound and trapped together with their new partners, Carter and Caitlin," she says. "When the dust clears, a car has been torched, a man has been shot, and a divorce is in shambles."

Sandy first came upon the show while working at the Actor's Theatre of Louisville during the 1997 Humana Festival, where *Gun-Shy* had its world premiere. Now 13 years later, she is directing her own production of it.

"We fell in love with the script, its chaotic pacing, biting dialogue — and promised that one day we would produce it ourselves when the time was right," says Clay Cockrell, Sandy's husband and J CITY's other co-founder. "We think that time is now. It's a great comedy for a hot summer."

Like Sandy, Clay is also acting in the show, playing the part of Carter. Art Delo (Duncan), Katherine Damigos (Caitlin) and Jeffery Wisniewski (Other People) round out the cast. Notably absent from that list is J CITY's associate artistic director, Kellis Carroll, who will not be on stage — a first for a J CITY production. Instead, Carroll is coordinating the designs and working on house management this time around.

"He is our 'everyman,'" Clay says.

Once again, J CITY is also pairing the theatrical performance with an art exhibition in its "Underground Theater" space. This show, curated by Hernando Rico Sanchez, features work by Daniel Brophy and Nelson Alvarez, and it will include works in the actual set of the play, as well as a more traditional gallery of work outside the performance space.

"The exhibition is a perfect complement to the production," Sanchez says. "It explores the relationship

between reality and the deformities of our infatuated and interrupted memories."

As Clay and Sandy were busy yesterday putting finishing touches on the production, they took a few minutes to bring us up to speed on the show and J CITY's ongoing journey.

Is J CITY bringing anything new to the play, or sticking pretty close to the original version?

I think Sandy has a wonderful ability to focus on the actor's of a production — bringing out their strengths and power while telling the story with simplicity. This is very different from the original production — which had high production values in a large theater. We love the privilege of creating an intimate experience for the actor and audience.

How do you all decide when to do comedies and when to do dramas? Is there a rhyme and reason to it, or does it just happen somewhat organically?

"Organically" is always a result of the work done in the selection process; a process of reading plays, seeing plays, awareness of current issues and the story that feeds us as artists. We've found that comedies always do well in the summer — it's a "light" time of year. But ultimately, we always chose scripts that move us.

So, J CITY is starting its 5th season. How does that feel?

It's a great feeling to look back and realize all that we have accomplished. I like to think of it all as a precursor to

what is to come. Now that we have a permanent home, we have a full season planned, which we have never been

able to do. I can't wait to see what our 10th anniversary looks like.

What's been the most rewarding part of the experience so far?

Our audiences. I love how supportive they have been. I love being stopped in the grocery store and being told how a particular moment in a particular production really affected a person's life. I love that we have created an addictive response from our audiences. One audience person said all a person has to do is see one show of ours — and they will never miss another one. We've had people move their vacation plans so they wouldn't miss a show. About 60 percent of our audiences come from NYC, but it's great to see the Jersey City audiences begin to grow.

And, on the flip side, what's been the most difficult?

I think it's the publicity aspect as well as funding. It's very challenging to get the word out on a limited budget. I still have people come up to us after the show and wonder why such a great company is relatively unknown. We do the best we can, but for the present, I've come to terms with being Jersey City's best kept secret.

Speaking of difficult experiences, last fall the Fire Department stopped by on opening night of your production of *Passion* and informed you of some code issues. Has that all been cleared up?

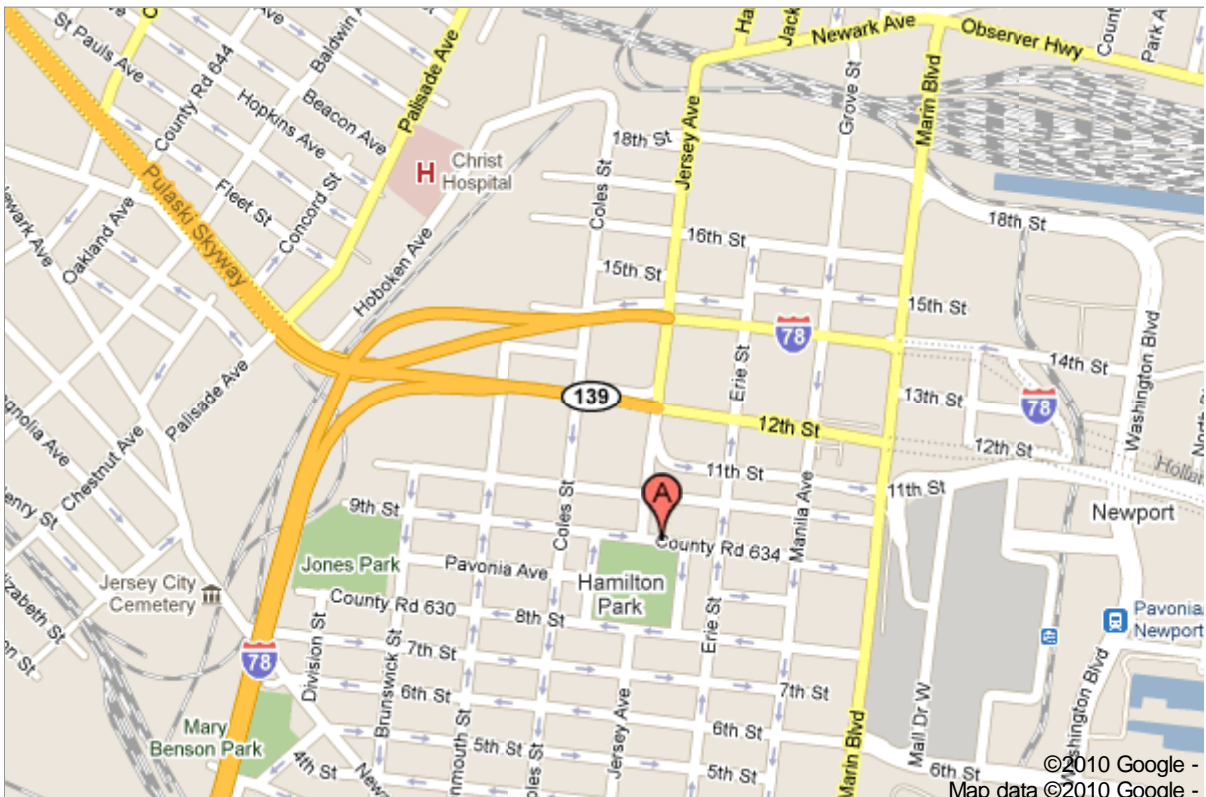
Yes! Finally. The Fire Department was simply doing their job — insuring public safety. Their timing was a little difficult (showing up on opening night) but they have since been very generous with their time and direction as we worked to fix all of their concerns. I'm happy to say that they have given us

a clean bill of health and safety. And I've turned some of them into big fans of the company — I expect to see several fire safety officials in the front row. They've become very vocal supporters.

More photos:



J CITY Theater's production of Gun-Shy is being performed July 21-24 and July 28-31 at 8 pm; at The Underground Theater at St. Michael's Church, 252 9th St. Tickets are \$20, and you can purchase them **online here**, or at the door, if available. For more info, **click here**.



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Jon Whiten is the editor and co-publisher of the *Jersey City Independent* and *NEW* magazine.

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Enjoyed the show. Well worth the admission.

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