

[DC Theatre Scene . Washington's liveliest theatre web site](#)

< /br> < /br>

Hugh Panaro
Theodore Bikel

Robert Prosky
Brad Oscar

Karen Kandel
Mojo Mickybo

Chita Rivera
Richard Seff

DCTS Audience Choice Awards

DCTS PODCASTS - we throw a marvelous party

.... LISTEN IN

Mark Shugoll
J Fred Schiffman

John Kander
Marc Kudisch

Walter Charles
The Glory Days

Stephen Schwartz
Karen Kandel

Bill Irwin
Lypsinka

[A Nervous Smile](#)

☐ July 18th, 2008 by [Danielle Martin](#) | ~



A Nervous Smile
by Danielle Martin



What's cool about Fringe in concept is the possibility that on a shoe-string budget, the highlight is a small group of actors doing service to a playwright. Here, contemporary American playwright John Belluso's recently discovered works are easily sparked to life in this pared-down black box production.

The play situates itself in the opulent old money of New York City where every character remains an island—from Eileen (Suzanne Knapik) the pill-popping wife to her husband the vain glorious professor Brian (Anthony Van Eyck) and capped off by his younger mistress Nicole (the lovely to watch Samantha Merrick). The conceit that binds them is their children, both of whom have Cerebral Palsy, a wholly debilitating illness that limits brain function and communication. Their reactions to the children get summed up by Brian's last bitter monologue as he mournfully spits that for his daughter he feels "hate and love in the same moment."

The play is structured in melodramatic scenes that sometimes override the nuance of the characters and their torn state. And the comedy which should have bit at the audiences' heels seemed underwhelming and off-kilter. One note of absurdity is typified by the child's Dostoyevsky reading sailor-mouthed nanny, Blanca (dutifully played by Susan Smith).

However, what endures are a structure and humor that aptly serve something greater: the unsentimental glare of people who care for the disabled on a day-to-day basis. And in my mind, Belluso is *the* playwright to tackle it. (He died in 2006, having struggled with crippling illness from his teens onward.) Especially effective is hearing from the couple's child Emily, via her voicebox. There is a caution to seeing this show which is that the aforementioned sparks can be seen a mile away, but it is not in the revealing but in the laying bare of these people's lives that Belluso delivers a solid evening of theatre.

- **Running Time:** 70 minutes
- **Tickets:** [A Nervous Smile](#)
- **Remaining Shows:** Sat, July 19 at 10:30 . Sun, July 27 at 5
- **Where:** Warehouse, 1021 7th Street, NW

[Share This](#)