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The Good Ship Manhattan

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Also Available
From OWP

The Female Terrorist Project
by Ken Urban

6 Females, 1 Male

Synopsis: In an America where bombings and kidnappings are daily occurrences and civil liberties a thing of the past, Amelia documents the lives of famous female terrorists, from a homegrown anti-abortion assassin to a Palestinian hijacker. After a visit by an Agent from the Office of Homeland Security, Amelia finds herself drawn into a world more frightening than she could possibly have imagined.

Terminus Americana
by Matt Pelfrey

5 Males, 3 Females with double casting

Synopsis: After barely surviving an office rampage, Mac Winchell is thrust into a nightmare landscape populated by lost Marlboro Men, psychotic vagabonds, sinister corporate thugs and a strange cult known as a “The Church of Christ, Office Shooter”. Mac attempts to escape this twisted reality by undertaking a quest that ultimately leads him into the darkest corners of the American Dream. Terminus Americana is a surreal, visceral and challenging examination of our violence-saturated culture.

THE GOOD SHIP MANHATTAN

by
Paul Mullin

TIME: Act I Fall 2000 through Summer 2001
 Act II Fall 2001 through Spring 2002

PLACE: New York City

CHARACTERS:

Richard Butler, mid 30's
Ursula Hess, late 20's
Greg Esposito, early 40's
Michele Yee, mid to late 20's

The Good Ship Manhattan was originally produced by The Smaller Project at 2100 Square Feet Theatre in Los Angeles, California, opening on March 7, 2003, directed by William Salyers, produced by William Salyers and Alisa Wilson. Set design by Gary Smoot. The cast and crew was as follows:

Patrick Tuttle.....Richard Butler
Bart Tangredi.....Greg Esposito
Christy O'Keefe...Ursula Hess
Michelle Noh.....Michele Yee

Set design.....Gary Smoot
Sound design.....Tim Labor
Stage Manager.....Alicia Loggie
Lighting Design.....Michael Resnick
Costumes.....Molly Dewane
Props.....Matthew Fox

Playwright's notes from the original production . . .

I was on the toilet in my Queens apartment when the phone rang that morning. My wife was calling from the Times Square skyscraper she worked in, telling me to turn on the TV: apparently one of the twin towers was burning. Rumor had it that a plane crashed into it, an inconceivable accident given the blue crystal skies that day. I watched as the South Tower exploded with the impact of the second airliner, pants still down around my ankles. Clearly, this wasn't lightning striking twice.

Later that afternoon, waiting on the East side of the Queensboro bridge for my wife to walk off Manhattan (the same bridge that inspired Paul Simon to write "Feelin' Groovey"), I watched as tens of thousands marched to safety, more quietly and compliantly than I ever hope to see New Yorkers moving again.

Days later we attended an impromptu candlelight gathering outside our neighborhood fire station, which had lost two men. Other nearby companies lost as many as twenty. Maybe 75 or so folks of all colors and creeds crowded around the open station doors, while the fire men just sort of stood and stared blankly back at us. After an awkward spell, someone started singing "God Bless America". Others joined in, but few knew all the words. Happily there was a wannabe singer/actor turned playwright who knew the whole verse and was loud enough to carry the crowd through to the end with a lump in my throat and a profound gratitude in my heart that I was witnessing and playing part in this strange and --yes, goddammit!-- earnest moment.

Since then, my faith in this great country has wavered at times, but I continue to believe in the best that bittersweet Indian summer's evening seemed to promise.

THE GOOD SHIP MANHATTAN

by
Paul Mullin

ACT I

PROLOGUE

(The following four short pieces are spoken directly and earnestly to the audience as soliloquies.)

RICHARD: I was on the E Train the other day. It was rush hour and we were pretty packed in there. And there was this young woman. Not too terribly attractive, but pretty enough I guess. And I was standing quite close to her. Close enough to see the tiniest violet thread of a vein just under her eye, etched there like a signature, like a signature of life.

GREG: I was over this guy's house the other night. He's uh... I don't know... Iranian. He's in this development about a mile and a half outside the town I live in. The town I grew up in. I used to run my dirt bike out there. And it's not... you know. I mean, I got a nice house. All brick. Five bedrooms. Finished basement. Just put in central air. But... but he's got these cathedral ceilings. I mean that's just what breaks my heart. He's got these cathedral ceilings. And for some stupid reason, I always wanted cathedral ceilings.

URSULA: Patrick and John. John and Patrick. They're all I can seem to think about these days. And yet I don't seem to be able to do anything with them. They're slipping through my fingers. John and Patrick. Patrick and John.

MICHELE: Horowitz used to say, "Play Chopin as if it were Mozart, and Mozart as if it were Chopin."

SCENE 1 - TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2000

(All scene dates are indicated by a sign or projection of some sort. A phone chirps. Lights up on Richard sitting in an office cube, working the New York Times crossword. One side of the cube has a waist high counter in lieu of a full-height partition. Richard grabs the phone.)

RICHARD: Greg Esposito's office. This is Richard.

(Special up on Greg, driving and talking on his cell phone.)

GREG: Hi.

RICHARD: Hi.

GREG: What's going on?

RICHARD: Uh... who is this?

GREG: It's Greg.

RICHARD: Hi'ya, Greg. You in Houston?

GREG: Naw, still on my way to Newark.

RICHARD: Yeah? Traffic suck?

GREG: Eh, ain't too bad.

RICHARD: Well, that's good.

GREG: So... what's going on?

RICHARD: Not much. Everyone's off-site except for Michele.

GREG: Got the whole place to yourself, hunh?

RICHARD: Oh yeah. The entire fifty story building is deserted. It's like Omega Man.

GREG: Such a wise ass you are.

RICHARD: Me? Nah.

GREG: So what's going on?

RICHARD: Not much.

GREG: What the hell you do there, all the auditors off site?

RICHARD: All kinds of stuff. Catch up on stuff. Filing.

GREG: Is all the filing done?

RICHARD: The filing is done.

GREG: How 'bout those Yankees last night?

RICHARD: Now why would you bait me?

GREG: Was I baiting you?

RICHARD: I believe I mentioned at a prior point how much I hate the stinkin' Spankees.

GREG: You know it's wrong to hate.

RICHARD: Sorry. I'm from Baltimore. I'm bred this way. We hate.

GREG: You know, if I was different kind of boss, I'd hold your hatred against you.

RICHARD: Well, thank heavens you're not then.

GREG: I'm a nice guy, don't you think? I mean, I am not your typical tight-assed accountant-type. I'm gregarious.

RICHARD: Gregarious Greg.

GREG: I talk to people. I give gifts. I'm affable. Indeed, one might say "convivial".

RICHARD: Beneficent.

GREG: Benevolent.

RICHARD: Benignant.

GREG: Benignant?

RICHARD: Benignant.

GREG: Bullshit.

RICHARD: What are you talking about?

GREG: Not a word, “benignant.”

RICHARD: Oh, ye doubter.

GREG: You’re full of shit.

RICHARD: I am not. Here I’ll look it up right now. One sec--

*(Richard pivots to his computer, begins typing
Michele enters.)*

RICHARD: Hold on... hold on.... Aha! Here we go: “Benignant--
kindly or gracious, sometimes in a patronizing way.” That’s you!

GREG: Fuck you. I have never heard anyone use that word in my entire
fucking life.

RICHARD: You should get out more.

MICHELE: Is that Greg?

GREG: Is that Michele?

RICHARD: Yes.

MICHELLE: Does he need to
talk to me?

GREG *(simultaneous)*: I don’t
wanna talk to her.

(Richard shakes his head at Michele’s question.)

MICHELE: Actually, I need to talk to him. Can you transfer him in to
my office?

RICHARD: Sure.

(Michele goes back to her office.)

RICHARD: Greg?

GREG: Yeah.

RICHARD: Michele needs to talk to you. I’m gonna transfer you.

GREG: No. Tell her I'm about to park the car.

RICHARD: Okay.

GREG: Okay.

RICHARD: So... I better let you go then.

GREG: Nah. I got a couple more miles to Newark.

RICHARD: Oh. Okay.

GREG: So...

RICHARD: So.

GREG: What's going on?

RICHARD: Not much. How 'bout you?

GREG: Any mail?

RICHARD: Just your Wall Street Journal. How come it always smells like pumpkin guts?

GREG: What?

RICHARD: The Wall Street Journal. Is it the paper they're using? Or the ink?

GREG: Do you have enough to do?

RICHARD: Or the combination? Or what?

GREG: I mean, I can come up with things for you to do.

RICHARD: Well, that's what I'm here for.

GREG: Is all the filing done?

RICHARD: The filing is done.

GREG: Great. You know, you're all right, Richard. I don't care what people say about you.

RICHARD: Thank you, Greg.

GREG: I'm gonna be in the office tomorrow. I wanna talk to you about something. Okay?

RICHARD: Okay.

GREG: All right... I'm at Newark. I gotta go.

(Richard hangs up. Special out on Greg. Michele reappears.)

MICHELE: Where's Greg?

RICHARD: Oh, the plane was boarding.

MICHELE: Yeah, okay. It's not your fault. He hates me.

RICHARD: Come on.

MICHELE: He hates me.

RICHARD: He doesn't hate you.

MICHELE: I'm annoying and he hates me.

RICHARD: You're not annoying and he doesn't hate you.

MICHELE: Tell me something truthfully.

RICHARD: What?

MICHELE: How annoying am I?

RICHARD: Not.

MICHELE: You don't know.

RICHARD: I know.

MICHELE: No, you don't. You can't. Greg knows. We work very closely together and I annoy the crap out of him. Sorry.

RICHARD: For what?

MICHELE: My language.

RICHARD: What?

MICHELE: Crap.

RICHARD: Yeah, you should wash your mouth out.

MICHELE: Have you ever been more annoyed?

RICHARD: Yes.

MICHELE: When?

RICHARD: Just recently.

MICHELE: Oh, yeah. By who?

RICHARD: Whom?

MICHELE: What?

RICHARD: By whom. Not "by who".

MICHELE: Oh. By whom, then?

RICHARD: Well, by Greg, actually.

MICHELE: You find Greg annoying?

RICHARD: Don't you?

MICHELE: I hadn't thought about it.

RICHARD: Maybe porcupines aren't prickly to other porcupines.

MICHELE: So I am annoying.

RICHARD: No. And that's not true, actually. Fact is, porcupines are prickly to other porcupines.

MICHELE: And I annoy Greg.

RICHARD: Well, I'm really only just talking about porcupines now.

MICHELE: I thought you were trying to make some kind of point.

RICHARD: I thought so too, but, in retrospect... I'm backing off that.

MICHELE: Oh.

RICHARD: Yeah.

MICHELE: So.

RICHARD: So... yeah.

MICHELE: I better get back to this report. Greg wants it done by yesterday.

RICHARD: Yeah, see?

MICHELE: What?

RICHARD: That's annoying.

MICHELE: What?

RICHARD: Wanting something yesterday. It's like wanting a 110 percent. Utterly fucking annoying.

MICHELE: He's just demanding. I find it challenging.

RICHARD: Yeah, well... that's fabulous.

MICHELE: Yeah... so.

RICHARD: Yeah.

MICHELE: How's your crossword coming?

RICHARD: Ah, I'm stuck on one that seems to be key.

MICHELE: I don't even try past Tuesday.

RICHARD: Oh, come on.

MICHELE: I'm serious. I suck at those. Tuesday's my limit.

RICHARD: I usually don't bother till Wednesday, at least. I could cruise if I got 34 down-- "Chopin practice piece", five letters.

MICHELE: Etude.

RICHARD: Etude?

MICHELE: Yeah.

RICHARD: So much for sucking.

MICHELE: I took piano for seventeen years.

RICHARD: Seventeen years? When did you first start? In utero?

MICHELE: When I was four.

RICHARD: Wow.

MICHELE: Suzuki at first, then private lessons, then Juilliard.

RICHARD: Whoa. Juilliard? You must've been a pro.

MICHELE: Not really. My sister is though.

RICHARD: You went to Juilliard and now you're a bean counter.

MICHELE: Um... we kinda prefer CPA.

RICHARD: Why would anyone do this if they could play piano?

MICHELE: I can't speak for anyone but me.

RICHARD: So speak for you.

MICHELE: It's not a big deal.

RICHARD: All right. If you say so.

MICHELE: All right. I'm gonna get back to the report.

(She turns and goes. A moment later she comes back to Richard's counter.)

MICHELE: Do you like movies?

RICHARD: Sure.

MICHELE: Have you seen Castaway?

RICHARD: Nope.

MICHELE: Wanna do me a favor?

RICHARD: Possibly.

MICHELE: Take this.

RICHARD: What is it?

MICHELE: It's the receipt for two tickets I prepaid for Castaway for 7:30 tonight. My friend backed out and there's no way I'm gonna finish this report before midnight.

RICHARD: Screw the report. Go to the movie.

MICHELE: Right. No. You take them. They're on me. You got a girlfriend, right? I just don't want them to go to waste.

RICHARD: I'll tell ya what, I'll help you finish the report, and let's both go.

MICHELE: Really?

RICHARD: Why not?

MICHELE: I don't know. This report's pretty--

RICHARD: Blah, blah, blah. Let's go; you're wasting time.

(Richard walks around the counter and takes Michele by the arm, leading her offstage.)

SCENE 2 - WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2000

(Lights up on Richard in his cube. Greg enters, coat and stylish attaché in hand.)

RICHARD: Morning, Greg.

GREG: Morning.

(Greg goes into his office, hangs his coat and opens his attaché. He punches an intercom button.)

GREG *over the intercom*: You wanna come in here for second?

RICHARD: Sure.

(Richard goes into Greg's office.)

GREG: Have a seat.

RICHARD *sitting*: Thanks.

GREG: How long you been temping here?

RICHARD: Um... I don't know. Two months?

GREG: That's a while, hunh?

RICHARD: Well, I temped almost a year at a firm down in the World Financial Center.

GREG: How long you been in New York?

RICHARD: Two and a half years.

GREG: And you were a schoolteacher before that?

RICHARD: That's right.

GREG: What'd you teach?

RICHARD: Social studies.

GREG: What age?

RICHARD: Tenth grade, mostly.

GREG: Greg Junior's in Ninth Grade.

RICHARD: That's great.

GREG: I guess. I'm lucky I get three words a week out of him.

RICHARD: Yeah, well... they can be that way, that age.

GREG: Boys especially, right?

RICHARD: I'd say so. Yeah.

GREG: Must be a bitch to teach 'em.

RICHARD: I found ways.

GREG: Yeah?

RICHARD: Oh yeah.

GREG: But now you're here.

RICHARD: Yeah.

GREG: What do you... uh... you have any career aspirations?

RICHARD: Uh... nope. Not really.

GREG: Do you have any idea how easy it is to do what I do? I mean... it's not easy. It's actually pretty demanding. But you're obviously very intelligent. If you applied yourself, you could be an auditor with this outfit in a just a couple years. Could probably even get the company to pay for your coursework.

RICHARD: Well, I don't actually work for the company.

GREG: You want to?

RICHARD: Doing what?

GREG: Same thing as now: admin support for the team... but with an eye towards moving your way up maybe, little by little.

RICHARD: Yeah... I uh... I don't think I'm really cut out to be an accountant. Not that I'm sure it's not... fascinating.

GREG: Don't fucking yank me. All I'm saying, it's a living.

RICHARD: Yeah. Absolutely. Something to think about.

GREG: You want a job or not.

RICHARD: Well. I honestly enjoy the flexibility of temping-- always having the option of... you know...

GREG: Telling us to fuck off when you're sick of us.

RICHARD: Well...

GREG: You get no bennies: no health coverage, no paid days off, no vacation, no invite to the stinking holiday party. It's a sucker's game.

RICHARD: If I committed to a full-time job here I'd have to be making more than I do right now.

GREG: Of fucking course you'd be making more than you do right now. I couldn't feed my dog on what you make right now.

RICHARD: Yeah.

GREG: Whaddya say?

RICHARD: Can I think about it?

GREG: No. "Can I think about it." It's a no-brainer. Take the job. How can you lose?

RICHARD: Okay. Fine. I'll take it.

GREG: Good. We'll make you official on Monday.

RICHARD: Great.

(Greg stands, puts out his hand.)

GREG: Congratulations.

(Richard stands and shakes.)

RICHARD: Thanks.

GREG: Okay, now get outta here.

RICHARD: Cool.

(Richard goes to leave. He stops at the door.)

RICHARD: Open or closed?

GREG: Uh, leave it open.

RICHARD: 'Kay.

GREG: Uh, second thought, close it.

RICHARD: 'Kay.

(Richard closes the door and goes back to his seat. After a short moment, his intercom buzzes.)

GREG *(over the phone intercom)*: Uh... Richard.

RICHARD: Yeah, Greg.

GREG *intercom*: You wanna come in here for second?

RICHARD: Sure.

(Richard gets up and goes into Greg's office. Greg holds up a stapled packet of papers.)

GREG: What's this?

RICHARD *(squinting to read it)*: Uh...the BSAB report?

GREG: What's wrong with this picture?

RICHARD: The picture?

GREG: What's wrong with it?

(Pause.)

RICHARD: Uh... I give up.

GREG: Look at the staple.

RICHARD: Okay. There's something wrong with it?

GREG: Yes.

RICHARD: It's stapled improperly?

GREG: Yes.

RICHARD: Okay. Uh...

GREG: You did this yourself, didn't you?

RICHARD: Yeah.

GREG: Because the copy machine inserts the staple so that it's parallel to the left edge of the paper.

RICHARD: Yeah... that's true.

GREG: But your staple is at a 45 degree angle-- more or less-- to the edges of the paper.

RICHARD: Yeah, that's... true.

GREG: Why?

RICHARD: Why?

GREG: Why would you do that?

RICHARD: Why would I staple it that way?

GREG: Yeah.

RICHARD: Well... I haven't, you know, really given it much thought. But if I were... to give it some thought...

GREG: Please. Give it some thought.

RICHARD: I'd say it's easier to fold the top sheet that way.

GREG: No.

RICHARD: No?

GREG: I don't find that to be the case. And I deal with a lot of stapled pages.

RICHARD: Okay.

GREG: I don't understand why you would deviate from the way the copy machine does it.

RICHARD: I... I guess 'cuz... the copier doesn't... have that option, and I do.

GREG: Yeah, Richard, this isn't about civil liberties here. It's about making sure things are done right. These reports go out to important people.

RICHARD: Well, actually, that's a draft copy: only the team sees that.

GREG: So the team's not important? I'm not important enough to have my report stapled properly?

RICHARD: No, I--

GREG: Look. Just reprint this and staple it properly.

RICHARD: Seriously?

GREG: Yeah. Seriously.

RICHARD: That's a twenty-page report.... Couldn't I... just... re-staple it?

GREG: But then there'd be staples holes in the wrong places, wouldn't there?

RICHARD: Yeah... yeah there would. *(Richard takes the report and goes to leave. He stops at the door.)* Open or closed?

GREG: Closed, please.

RICHARD: 'Kay.

GREG: Uh, Richard?

RICHARD: Yeah, Greg.

GREG: Second thought, g'head and leave it open.

RICHARD: 'Kay.

(Richard goes back to his cube.)

SCENE 3 - SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2000

(Richard and Michele on a sidewalk.)

RICHARD: God, that was so.... I mean, hearing that music, then walking out on to the street, surrounded by skyscrapers, moonlight.... Amazing. *(He looks over at Michele, stops in his tracks.)* Hey.

(Michele tries to keep walking, but he manages to catch her elbow.)

RICHARD: What's a matter?

(Michele says nothing. Richard reaches up and touches her cheek with his finger.)

RICHARD: What's this?...

(He shows her the tear.)

RICHARD: You want it?

(Michele shakes her head.)

RICHARD: Okay. Well, it's mine now.

(He puts his finger in his mouth.)

RICHARD: Mmmm, salty.

(Michele stares at him for moment. Then starts walking again. He follows.)

RICHARD: I'll walk you to the subway if you want.

MICHELE: I'm... gonna catch a cab actually. There's a taxi stand at the hotel two blocks up.

RICHARD: Don't you live on Lex?

MICHELE: Yes.

RICHARD: The 6 runs right up Lex.

MICHELE: I know that.

RICHARD: So?...

MICHELE: I don't ride the subway after dark.

RICHARD: You're kidding.

MICHELE: Actually, I just don't ride the subway.

RICHARD: What's wrong with the subway?

MICHELE: Nothing. I just... prefer not to ride it.

RICHARD: That's psycho.

MICHELE: Don't call me psycho.

RICHARD: The subways are the cheapest, fastest way to get around this city. I wish the Baltimore subway went somewhere.

MICHELE: You didn't live here in the 70's.

RICHARD: So? How old were you, five?

MICHELE: Yes, and I had to ride them sometimes, and they were scary, so can you lay off?

RICHARD: Fine. I'll walk you to a taxi stand then.

MICHELE: Thank you, but that's not necessary.

RICHARD: I insist. Very scary, Madison Avenue.

MICHELE: Do you always make fun of people?

RICHARD: Very, very unnerving-- 'specially after dark. Oooh look! Le Cirque! Help me!

MICHELE: You're an a-hole.

(Pause.)

RICHARD: So?... Tell me what you thought.

MICHELE: About what?

RICHARD: The recital.

MICHELE: Oh, it was great. Thank you very much for inviting me.

RICHARD: It seemed to bum you out.

MICHELE: No, I loved it. Really. Thanks again. I'm sure those tickets weren't cheap.

RICHARD: Please, it was just payback for Castaway.

MICHELE: Yeah, but you helped me with my report, remember?

RICHARD: Whatever. Look: I get tickets to an evening of Mozart piano sonatas, who else am I gonna ask? Greg?

MICHELE: On a Saturday night, I'm sure you could have asked any number of eligible young women.

RICHARD: Yeah, you'd think that.... Anyway, I'm glad you came.

(Pause.)

MICHELE: It's just... hard for me some times, going to recitals.

RICHARD: 'Cuz you wish it was you up there playing?

MICHELE: No. Not at all. I just-- I might miss the music, I might even miss playing it, but I don't miss playing recitals.

RICHARD: Nerves?

MICHELE: No. I sucked.

RICHARD: Bullshit.... You did not suck.

MICHELE: Horowitz used to say, "Play Chopin as if it were Mozart, and Mozart as if it were Chopin."

RICHARD: Is that supposed to mean something to me?

MICHELE: No.

RICHARD: Sorry.... I have asshole's disease.... They're still working on a cure.... 'Til then I have to self-medicate with alcohol, but it doesn't... help much.

(Michele walks in silence for a moment.)

MICHELE: After my debut concert the Times said, "Michele Yee discharges her Mozart like an extremely proficient accountant..."

RICHARD: Ouch.

MICHELE: So I figure...why not be a bean counter... and be a virtuoso at it.

RICHARD: Eyeewwww.

MICHELE: What?

RICHARD: That's--

MICHELE: What?

RICHARD: Disturbing?

MICHELE: I never wanted to be a prodigy. Just normal.

RICHARD: What the hell is that, "Normal?"

MICHELE: It's normal. It's comfortable. Well off even. It's a house and family. It's--

RICHARD: It's Greg.

MICHELE: Okay... so?

RICHARD: So it's Greg. It's... you really wanna be Greg?

MICHELE: I certainly hope I'm in Greg's position in ten years.

(Richard shakes his head, blows a resigned raspberry.)

MICHELE: What?

RICHARD: He's clueless. He doesn't see anything. None of the suffering or anything that goes on right past his nose.

MICHELE: Why is seeing the suffering's a good thing?

RICHARD: Are you kidding me?

MICHELE: No, I just--

RICHARD: Seriously?

MICHELE: Yes.

RICHARD: You're literally asking me why seeing the suffering is a good thing?

MICHELE: Yes.