

Thrill Ride

After the ripchord fails. The final moment of one's life is one of those great mysteries that no living person fully grasps.

BY AUSTIN ARCHER

Stop me if you know this one: You're at a party eating finger foods and sipping a drink from a plastic Solo cup when someone asks if you'd rather die at home in bed surrounded by your loved ones, or go careening off a cliff face in a red Corvette blasting Aerosmith?

I've had this conversation many, many times (probably because I'm the one who brings it up). The final moment of one's life is one of those great mysteries that no living person fully grasps. For some of us it may be quick as a flash, with little to no time for contemplation. For some it may be a very long and drawn-out process, slowly but surely heading to finality. And for others, it may be a sudden event that almost certainly spells death, but takes just long enough to allow one to confront the enormity of what is taking place.

The idea for my play *Jump* came to me after the first and only time I went skydiving. When I bought my ticket to voluntarily jump out of a plane, I remember thinking that one of two things would happen: Either I'd live and have the thrill ride of my young life or I'd die in the most spectacular fashion possible. What ended up happening was a third option that I hadn't considered: I vomited for two hours straight and resolved never to skydive again; but that's not important. The acceptance of the first two options got me thinking: People who free climb a 1,000-foot cliff face, or base jump into the Grand Canyon, or fly 200 feet in the air on a motorcycle are entering into a mental agreement with themselves wherein they'll either

live and have a great tale to tell or they'll die in a blaze of glory. It's an essential part of the thrill. You might be heading to your demise, but you'll be accompanied by an intoxicating sense of presence and clarity.



My play *Jump* is the story of a failed skydive. As you may have guessed (spoiler alert—but not really), someone dies because, well... planes fly high and people aren't supposed to live after they jump out of them.

Jump's narrative really starts in the aftermath of this tragic accident. We revisit the jump several times throughout the play because you can't build a play around a skydive and not stage said dive. Admittedly an on-stage skydive is entertaining but it's also where the most dramatic and driving questions of the play live (and also it was the most fun part to write).

Jump began as an exploration of that final moment of mortality. But it's really about people, and grief, and the different ways we process death. That thing we all want to talk about at parties. That thing we all know is coming. The ground rising to meet the divers at break-neck speed.

Jump is (mostly) speculative, but that's what made writing it so much fun: deciding what a hypothetical end-of-life scenario to satisfy (mostly my) morbid curiosity—a thrill ride to finality—might feel like, sound like, look like. Maybe I'm the only one who's curious about death in this way. But I don't think I am. So, if you've ever been the slightest bit curious about what it might feel like to pull a ripcord only to discover your parachute isn't going to open, *JUMP* just might be for you. ♦

Austin Archer's *Jump* receives its world premiere April 5-15 at Plan-B Theatre in a co-production with Flying Bobcat Theatrical Laboratory in partnership with the David Ross Fetzler Foundation for Emerging Artists. Tickets and information: PLANBTHEATRE.ORG