



**S**taggering toward  
The Journey Home

**AMERICA**

## FringeNYC 2003 Reviews

—Christopher Moore, NYTheatre.com 8/19/2003

*Staggering Toward America* is the fascinating story of Rik Reppe's journey from California to New York in the wake of September 11, 2001. The stated quest of his trip is to discover for himself the meaning of America. It is a staggering question, but Reppe's performance does not stagger at all.

Written with intelligence, humor, and great affection for his subject, Reppe's story unfolds swiftly and with increasing urgency. Omitting autobiography, he presents a collection of diverse and colorful American characters responding to the tragic events of September 11. The portraits emerge almost like Norman Rockwell images painted by Andy Warhol. Reppe richly employs the symbols of America, whether it be the flag, the lemonade stand, or the "Star Spangled Banner" in a way the I've never experienced before. Both respectful and cynical, he arrives at a new form of patriotism that is richly authentic and well-observed. It is a unique picture of America. A self-admitted cynic, he avoids exploiting the emotions of September 11, yet ultimately communicates a message of optimism and courage. He finds an answer to his question, but that is incidental to the journey itself.

At turns charming, insightful, and always amiable, Reppe seamlessly weaves together a cross-country journey over a swift 90 minutes, building toward a surprising and unexpected conclusion. However, what gives weight to the performance is not simply the September 11 connection, but rather the details and personal investment with which Reppe tells his story. He is a dynamic storyteller. Director Jack Rowe ensures that the significant shifts in the story are clear without being too obvious, and the pace of the production is always spot on.

As a performer, Reppe is comfortable with his audience and material. Indeed, it is his lack of "performance" that lends even more power to the production. While I wish that there might have been more autobiographical material included (for example, what did his wife say as the journey went on?), this observation is meant only to encourage a talented writer and storyteller, who deals successfully with one challenging question, and appears more than able to handle many others.

—Dan Bacalzo, Theatremania.com 8/19/2003

It's difficult not to cry during *Staggering Toward America*. It's equally difficult not to laugh. Rik Reppe's powerful solo show tells the story of one man's search for the meaning of America post September 11, 2001.

The project is fraught with peril; there's the danger that it will come across as pretentious, overly sentimental, and/or clichéd. Reppe does occasionally fall into these traps but the majority of the 90-minute show is both hilarious and heartbreaking because Reppe is a skilled storyteller. He knows how to vary his cadence and tone of voice for maximum dramatic impact. He's charming and conversational, and he readily acknowledges the privileges that allowed him -- a heterosexual, white male with money in the bank -- to quit his job as a management consultant and drive cross-country, talking to people about how 9/11 affected them.

If he talked to politicians and activists, those stories aren't included here. Instead, Reppe spoke with a wide cross section of Americans of all races. There were requisite visits to Washington, D.C., New York, and Shanksville, PA, but what will remain with you after the performance are the very real human stories he recounts. He tells of a little girl in Texas who asked her father to donate all the money she possessed (\$6.17) and her beloved teddy bear to an orphaned girl in New York that she saw on TV. He tells of an African-American matriarch who guilt-tripped Reppe into visiting the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis when he had only planned to go to Graceland. And he tells of a surfer dude in North Carolina who visited New York right after September 11th on a lark and wound up going back again and again to volunteer. Reppe combines his narration with snippets of character impersonations that are never overdone and often add depth to his portrayals.

**-- Andy Propst, American Theatre Web 8/16/2003**

Following the attacks of 9-11, the detachment from the events on the East Coast that Oklahoman transplanted to Los Angeles Rik Reppe felt led to his chucking his job as a management consultant and a journey by pickup truck across country. His goal: to learn or at least try to understand what it meant to be an American. In ***Staggering Toward America***, Reppe tells of his cross-country odyssey and the result is an emotionally wrenching 70 minutes or so of theater.

Reppe's tales are mostly of the uplifting, sentimental sort – a 5 ½ year-old-girl from Texas who hears of a New Jersey girl her age who lost her father in the attacks on the World Trade Center. When the Texas girl's dad must travel to New York on business, she sends her one-eyed teddy bear with him, saying that the girl she's seen on TV needs him more. The father ultimately leaves the bear along with hundreds of others at St. Paul's Church in lower Manhattan. In other hands, this story might seem saccharine. In Reppe's telling it becomes a powerful emblem of post-Sept. 11 concern. Perhaps it's because one does not expect a burly man such as Reppe to find and be effected by such a tale.

Of course, as he nears the Pentagon and ultimately Ground Zero, his stories become increasingly emotional, and I admit that this piece caused a certain weepy catharsis in me. Reppe had surprised me – I expected a jaundiced Californian's view of the country post-Sept. 11. Instead, he gave me an exceptionally moving and insightful glimpse into the nation's psyche immediately following the tragedy.