

Laying it All Bare, an Interview With Jake Boston

SEPTEMBER 14, 2019 | INTERVIEWS | 7



By Cynthia Darling, Staff Writer, All About Solo

Like any free, creative soul, Jake Boston realizes that the world is his oyster. He has a craving to travel and explore the world, while educating himself further and sharing with young artists the skills and techniques he's acquired over 16 years onstage and in front of the camera.

Cynthia Darling: What are the core athletic values of bare knuckle fighting, and how have they affected your own personal identity journey and your understanding of masculinity?

Jake Boston: Really and truly, bare knuckle fighting was originally intended to quash any troubles or qualms any individuals or families had with one another. The fights could take place that night, or were planned in advance. Only in the past decade have fighters started scheduling fights to give each other the opportunity to get into shape, or at the very least, work on technique and form.

What are the challenges of writing and performing a show that investigates the effects of bare knuckle fighting?

For me personally, it was obviously very raw, exploring the ins and outs of my dad's life, gathering tales and stories from my cousins, uncles, etc. It was a real eye-opener for me. The life he had lived before he was my dad. It was intriguing but also quite barbaric. It was a challenge for me to hear all these stories whilst moulding my own experiences with my dad, and turning them into a full-fledged theatre show.

What are some of the ways your show interrogates common notions of masculinity?

Naturally, a topic such as fighting invokes a certain element of "fight or flight." With my father not present, it was "fight or flight," only. Masculinity was defined by how hard you could take a punch and how many of them! That was the way it was described to me by my father. He was my hero, and I was hung up on every word he said. He was my teacher. He did all his own dentistry work and cut his own hair.

What are the challenges of writing about personal identity and your own father?

Grief! Sorrow and pain! All things I felt whilst writing "Bare Knuckle." I only wrote the show to be performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and then intended to wash my hands of it. I wrote it simply for my own grieving process, as I did not cry at my dad's funeral, or even let it affect me during the first few years.

What did you discover about yourself and/or the artistic process through the writing process of "Bare Knuckle"?

I discovered that I was a much better storyteller than I ever thought I could be. Granted it took me 7 years, a little change, and so many different sessions sitting down with Dale, Shells, Stefan (friends and family depicted in the show), and my mum, to finally come up with the idea of making the show autobiographical.

What are the specific tropes of father/son relationships that are most challenging?

For me personally, it was knowing that I could never be the man my father wanted me to be. Our time together was cut short, and I never got a chance to make him a proud man. I denied him, disobeyed him, and eventually I paid the ultimate price by losing him. Writing about this made me feel such a disconnect from who my father wanted me to be - just like him - and naturally, I had my own experiences with life that shaped my path, career and goals.

"Bare Knuckle"
Written and Performed by Jake Boston
Directed by Lucy Richardson
Tuesday, Nov 19th at 7:30PM
Photo credit: Verona Lewis
The 2019 United Solo Theatre Festival
Theatre Row
410 West 42nd Street
New York City

CYNTHIA DARLING is a writer and teacher living in Hell's Kitchen. A writer for NAiME's Teaching Music magazine for many years, she also wrote for New York Family magazine. She is currently working toward an MFA in Creative Writing with the Bluegrass Writers Studio. Her fiction and nonfiction appear in Louisiana Literature, Schuykill Valley Journal, and Wanderlust Journal.



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