

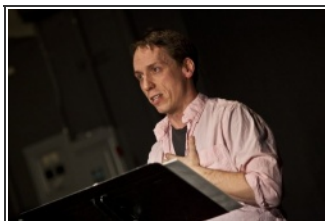
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MAR 04 **Steven Strafford's Methtacular! Experience**
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 Posted By: **Anna Sanders**

In *Methtacular!*, Steven Strafford proves that just because you may feel spectacular doesn't mean your crystal meth addiction is OK. Chronicling his own addiction to meth from 2000-2003 in Chicago through stories, songs and jokes, Strafford guides audiences through the ups and downs of drug addiction in *Methtacular!*, which will be at the Lion Theatre at Theatre Row Studios Monday, March 7 at 2 and 7.



Written and performed by Strafford, *Methtacular!* is just another chance for Strafford to showcase his acting abilities after his stint in the original Las Vegas cast of *Spamalot*. Directed by Adam Fitzgerald and with music direction by Michael Harren, the show began with two small-but-packed presentations last month. After *Methtacular!*'s original success, Strafford, raised in New Jersey but born in Brooklyn (an important distinction), explains how his former meth addiction became *Methtacular!*

New York Press: Why did you decide to write *Methtacular!*?

I was a meth addict for my early twenties and I have many years away from it now. My mom actually said to me, when I got home from that whole time, that I was a miracle and that, at some point, I needed to do something great with my life. As an actor, I've gotten to do these wonderful things. So many people don't get that good fortune, so many talented, talented people. This show feels like I'm walking in the right steps. You ask why, and the thing is, I truly believe that everybody is two or three decisions away from a big mess. It's just life. But what I hope what the show does is tell people that no matter what mess you're in today... I think that you're two or three good decisions from getting out of it. My particular story happens to be about drugs and happens to be about this young, gay guy trying to figure it out. I think that the story is good to hear because people go to dark places all the time... but you still have choices, you still get to go forward. But the humor end of it, I don't know how to tell a story without jokes. I'm Irish-Catholic: the currency in my family is humor. These are stories I would tell over dinner, maybe not with everybody. I sat down one day in my kitchen an all of a sudden started writing it.

I understand you've performed *Methtacular!* before.

We did a few [performances] in Philadelphia. Flashpoint Theatre Co hosted me, I thought they were great. So I worked with them and work-shopped it a little bit. I worked at the dramaturg, she's at a program up at A.R.T., and she and I worked on shaping it. Adam Fitzgerald, who's the director, he and worked with a producer to present the first two readings at Theatre Row. I thought it was going to be like, 'Oh, we'll get some people and it will mostly be my friends,' but it was very exciting. It reserved out like that, we had to turn people away. It just felt so lucky to be so supported. It was really great.

So you sing songs about meth. How do those go?

Well, I use popular music—although I did write the opening song of the show—to underscore the emotions of what's happening...to sometimes undercut. There's nothing like a '70s pop song to take the piss out of a really serious moment. As much as the stories and these events are a part of me, so is music and so is my

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really serious moment. As much as the stories and these events are a part of me, so is music and so is my belief that referencing music and referencing pop culture things is important. It's the way we communicate with each other, especially now. My storytelling is reflective of that and I use music to further the storytelling. Sometimes it's a break from the action, sometimes it deepens the action, sometimes it gives people a little distance and sometimes, I think, it brings people further in. The songs aren't about meth, per say. Really, the story is about trying to figure it out. Obviously the title is ironic, but at the time, it did feel spectacular. I thought I had figured it out.

Do you think that people might be offended by your show?

I don't know why they would be. I'm not a very offensive person. I'm frank. In the show, I talk about stuff. I don't have any shame about it. I talk frankly about sex and I talk frankly about drug use, but I also talk frankly about throw pillows. I have a whole section where I talk about how I don't understand throw pillows... I don't understand the process of everyday taking off the pillow to put it back. Some people are going to be uncomfortable, but if they stick with it, I think they will have an experience definitely worth having.

How do you get the audience to really feel what it's like to be on meth?

I talk about the first time I do it. Basically, I'm telling the story about getting there and it's being presented to me and I decide to do it and then I say, 'I take it in.' and the next thing I say is, 'I'm the single most attractive person who's ever walked the planet.' There's nothing wrong with me...that's what it felt like. The thing about drugs is that they're a quick band-aid to pain. But it doesn't work for long and you need to keep putting on your band-aids. I guide people through it and, as the story gets tougher, it's tougher for the audience, too. I'm like Virgil in Dante's *Inferno*. I'm like, 'Come with me, we're going to go down to here, are you cool?'

Is there anything else you'd like to add about the show?

I think in this age of reality television and *Intervention*, in the age of people being aware of these things, I think it's always good to put a human frailty and humor on something that seems so scary. Because it should be scary, meth is scary. But it's also people, it's not something far away. I mean, I'm a nice guy who went to college, who is well spoken and I went through this crazy thing. I think it's good to sit down and be taken on that ride, to go somewhere a little scary, with someone that's a tour guide who's going to make sure you're OK the whole time.

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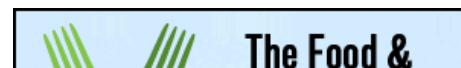
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