

Reviews of Weaverville Waltz:

“Weaverville Waltz”

(Review from Edmonton’s *Vue Weekly* magazine, by Maureen Fenniak, Aug 23, 2001.)

My Brother Sang Like Roy Orbison was one of my favorite shows last year (Fringe or otherwise); by the end of that story, when the narrator (Randy Rutherford) sees his beloved but estranged older brother after 30 years, I was gulping back that big lump in my throat and my eyes were getting watery. This year the tone and tempo in *Weaverville* is different, but just as powerful. Rutherford has an uncanny eye for the discarded and overlooked ephemera of experience. His stories seem full of apparent narrative accidents, which gives his performance a meandering, spontaneous quality and freestyle charm that’s utterly convincing and far from artless. ★★★★★

“Weaverville Waltz”

(Review in the *Victoria Times Colonist* by Adrian Chamberlain, Aug 29, 2001.)

Storyteller weaves compelling tale

San Francisco actor/playwright Randy Rutherford has regularly performed at the Victoria fringe festival in recent years. The word seems to be out on this engaging monologist - his first show here was full.

His other autobiographical work, *My Brother Sang Like Roy Orbison*, chronicled his young adult years. *Weaverville Waltz* is about his early experiences as a child and a teenager growing up in Smalltown, U.S.A. (i.e. Weaverville, pop 2003). Rutherford exhibits a writer’s keen eye for telling details: the tiny gap between his adored mother’s front teeth, or the way the lead singer in a high-school rock band used to bob his head slightly (it looked cool, but was actually the result of a neurological condition).

The protagonist of *Weaverville Waltz* lives in a trailer park. They aren’t rich, yet life is fairly good - with one proviso. His stepfather is a controlling alcoholic who controls and disrupts his family’s lives in a way that’s reminiscent of Tobias Wolff’s *This Boy’s Life*. Lou, the step-dad, is a bullying man’s man who loves Hank Williams, whiskey and regularly accuses his wife of being “a whore”.

At times, *Weaverville Waltz* is almost too sweet to be true, especially when Rutherford speaks of dating the prettiest cheerleader in school and slow dancing a la *American Graffiti* to Elvis Songs.

However, he’s too clever to let things get saccharine, and the ogre of his step-father, always lurking underneath, saves the show from sentimentality.

Rutherford makes story-telling seem effortless, yet much skill has gone into making this narrative compellingly dramatic, poignant and heart-warming. ★★★★★

“Weaverville Waltz”

(Review from the Edmonton Journal by Alan Kellogg, Aug 20, 2001)

Trailer-trash tale quickly rises to the top of the heap Weaverville Waltz will sweep you off your cynical feet

California monologist Randy Rutherford, whose *My Brother Sang Like Roy Orbison* was a standout at last year’s Fringe, returns with another strong, heartfelt piece rooted in memory.

Time-travel to the Whispering Pines Trailer Court in small town northern California, where Randy grew up in sight of Mount Baldy with his gentle, long-suffering mother Loraine Jane (a somewhat plumper Betty Grable with goofy glasses) and stepfather Lou, a boorish, hard-drinking, chicken-fried-steak-eating lout much of the time, who loves Velveeta because “it’s the only cheese that ain’t stinky.”

It’s the classic American ‘50s of tuna casserole and Ferlin Husky, Saturday morning westerns and high school homecoming dances, roadsters with chrome headers, McCarthy’s swimming hole and Shirley’s ice-cream parlour. Rutherford frames his bittersweet narrative with shards of period songs: *Are You Lonesome Tonight*, *Moon River*, *Chances Are*, *Don’t Be Cruel*. We follow solid, sympathetic Randy through his May-September high school romance with Cheryl, her jealous, wet-pawed ex-boyfriend Rick Large, Rutherford’s big football disaster, the night the local legend took on the town constabulary and especially, the arc of Loraine and Lou’s marriage.

Tender but rarely sentimental, attenuated to the dark side without slipping into cynicism, Rutherford is a master at this form, as careful with the small details as the big picture.

There will be those who would avoid this on the usually sound grounds of unwanted boomer nostalgia, but they would be making a mistake. Rutherford may use his childhood era as a palette, but the resulting art is universal. ★★★★★ 1/2 stars

“Weaverville Waltz”

(Review from See Magazine by Gilbert Bouchard, Aug 21, 2001.)

The Fringe is at it’s best when simple. What do you need beyond talented performers and strong, unvarnished text? Case in point, Randy Rutherford’s sublime *Weaverville Waltz*. Spanning its protagonist’s life from the late ‘50s to the present, this work is a straight-ahead, visceral tale-spinning, manly chronicling the poignant highlights of a more-typical-than-not, albeit harsh, trailer-park upbringing. Rutherford’s command of the language and a warm, super-engaging presentation makes for a mesmerizing production. The work is the definition of honest, trusting its material and endlessly accurate in its sense of the human condition without succumbing to bitterness or the maudlin. Five stars.

Robert Enright

CBC TV Canda Now

“WEAVERVILLE WALTZ”

Randy Rutherford has the instincts and the powers of observation necessary to be a novelist and his one-man play about growing up in Weaverville, California has a lot in common with good fiction. It is full of telling detail - a character with pale blue eyes “the colour mountains have when they’re really far off”; the one grey tooth of a schoolboy hero - and even more expressive emotion. This is really a love story and like most compelling love stories, it’s incomplete. Young Randy is desperately in love with his mother and his mother destructively in love with his stepfather, and that complicated triangle generates much of the play’s staying-power. Everything about Lorraine-Jane (from the space between her teeth, to her Betty Grable looks) fascinates him; similarly, everything about his stepfather, from his taste in cheese to his leering drunkenness and violence, repels him. “Weaverville Waltz” is about how Randy uses memory to come to terms with his past and the ghosts, benign and malignant, that continue to haunt him. Mr. Rutherford’s performance is delicate and carefully orchestrated and he uses song fragments - that he sings a cappella - to correspond with and fill out the spoken emotions in the play.

A number of other characters populate his active story-telling - Ester Lillywhite and her religiously fanatic mother; Jake Stoker, the Legend of Trinity High; and Cheryl Davey, the rich girl who lives about as far away from the Whispering Pine Trailer Park as a human being can - but they’re all brought into focus through Randy’s ferocious and needy remembering. His is a very powerful story that speaks from the heart about the unresolved loves in all our lives. One thing he does have in common with his stepfather is an understanding of this country and western song-line: “I can’t help it if I’m still in love with you.” For Rutherford onlyh emotion endures, and the characters that come to life i8n this fine telling of his coming-to-manhood, embody that necessary and enduring emotion. “Weavervill Waltz” is full of sentiment but never sentimental. I recommend it highly.

Review by Jo Ledingham from the Vancouver Courier, Sept. 9, 2002

Weaverville Waltz

Venue 8 (The Big Top)

CARE TO DANCE?

Weaverville Waltz, a bittersweet Fringe play starring Randy Rutherford, delivers humor, irony and classic ‘50s tunes.

LONG WALTZ WORTH THE TIME

At 90 minutes, *Weaverville Waltz* is long but it’s easy to be seduced by creator/performer Randy Rutherford’s storytelling. He’s alone up there and it feels like his own story, a story of a boy who lives in a small-town California trailer court with his mom Lorraine Jane who calls him her “darlin’ little tater pie” and his alcoholic stepfather Lou. Rutherford is a charismatic guy with a dry sense of humor, a well-developed sense of irony and he has an affinity and a great voice for the music of the ‘50s: “Young Love”, “Blue Moon”, “Are You Lonesome Tonight”, “I Can’t Help It If I’m Still In Love With You”, etc.

Adolescent Randy, at four-feet, 10-and-half inches and 87 po0ounds, doesn’t come close to Lou’s expectations on the football field or with the girls. (“Hey, boy, are you wettin’ her woolly?” he crudely asks). But when Lou calls Lorraine Jane “a fuckin’ whore,” it looks like Randy just might blow Lou’s brains out with his deer gun. But it’s not that kind of story. It’s fragile, bittersweet and tells Randy, and us, something about the different faces of love.

“Weaverville Waltz”

(Review from the Edmonton Sun by Fish Griwkowsky, Aug 24, 2001.)

If you’ve spent any time in northern California it smacks hard that you’re in the kingdom of the freak show.

Things go on in those woods and trailer parks that won’t be done here for a couple of hundred years. And some things done there have been going on since the explorers first came to town, ready to slaughter.

Randy Rutherford’s charming monologue about growing up in Weaverville, California, on Highway 299 near Shasta Lake, hints at this dark world, full of incredible detail while showing the healed scars of an oft-broken heart. Above all, despite the demons, you can tell he loves it more than anything in the world. It’s a love story with the last chapter perfectly missing.

Like all ‘50s survivors, Rutherford explores the hypocrisy of visions of the forced nuclear family: mom in the kitchen, dad smoking a pipe and tossing the ball with his kids, a dog barking and the whole gang laughing in freeze frame as the credits roll.

In his case, reality was his plump mom enduring and overcoming the barbs of Lou, his drunken skunk of a stepfather. And, in less than a couple hours, we see their whole story play out. Marvelous storytelling, really.

But, of course, what really makes this play fly is the portrait of the entire town, trailer park and all. It’s nothing short of damn inspiring, and makes you take deeper note of the spitting cuckolds, street musicians and bosses with bad hair in your life, so you too can shake up the ghosts for others when the time comes.

With details like blue eyes the color of mountains when they’re really far off, you know you’d better get reading more to match Rutherford’s library of bull’s-eye prose and weaving words. Summer romance, football games and old-school rebels standing up to the law - it’s all cliché.

But Rutherford breathes such life into it you can’t use that word. Monolithic archetype. That’s more accurate.

Interspersed with pre-rock and roll songs (still can’t get *Moon River* out of my head), Rutherford’s nostalgia runs deep, and if anything his music is the most beautiful part, just the man there on the stage, pouring out his heart about loves that washed away with the eternal tide.

When it’s over, you feel like you’re good friends with the man, and it’s heartbreaking to walk by him later and have him not recognize you. This, then, is the genius of simple narration gone right. ★★★★★

Review by Kathleen Oliver from the Georgia Straight (Vancouver, BC) Sept 6-13,2001
Weaverville Waltz

True to its title, this show picks you up and sweeps you around the room. Randy Rutherford's recollections of his childhood in a tiny northern California town in the 1950s are full of laughter, love, and heartache. One of the most compelling figures in Randy's years as "the littlest freshman ever" to attend his high school is his stepfather, Lou, an alcoholic whose jealousy is so intense that at one point, Randy's adored mother asks her son not to hug or kiss her anymore. It's a credit to Rutherford that he resists making Lou a one-dimensional monster; instead, he subtly captures Randy's ambivalence toward Lou and just about everything else, including his first girlfriend and inevitable heartbreak. Rutherford is an expert storyteller, creating a fully textured world complete with lovely a cappella song snippets and complex characters who will stay with you long after the show is over.