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## **1984**

By: *Tim Browning* [bio](#)



*Daniel Rappaport as Winston Smith*

**I**n a world where expressing an opinion can earn a person the epithet "traitor," the subject matter of 1984 is clearly relevant. This massively important book has been adapted for the stage by Nicu's Spoon, an exciting new theater company that is gaining a reputation as one of the better off-off Broadway companies in the city. This production represents the type of risk more companies should be taking, while at the same time demonstrating why so few companies do.

The artists who adapted this for the stage were faced with, what I feel, is an insurmountable dilemma. 1984 is such an icon that a high percentage of theatergoers are familiar with the premise even if he or she isn't very familiar with the book. However, the piece must stand on its own two feet independently of anyone's familiarity with it. Every year, there are many successful adaptations of novels, but 1984 is different. Certainly, there is a story which revolves around a man having the courage to stand up to a repressive society.

But 1984 is also a book of philosophy, and in order to appreciate it fully, Orwell must spend many pages imagining what this anti-utopian society might look like. Unfortunately, the play, particularly in the first act, gets bogged down in philosophizing and didacticism. This is particularly problematic if one knows the book. Dramatizing this governmental oppression simply doesn't illuminate or educate. We simply have to endure it to get to "the story." It works far better in act two, when we see the hero fighting against the system on moral principles, while his wife fights the system for pragmatic ones. She just wants to be happy, and live a "normal" life. She is not by nature a freedom fighter.

Barton-Farcas does a splendid job of creating mood. Upon arrival into the theater, we are stopped by an imposing guard and given a (easily washable) hand-stamp. A trifle gimmicky, but genuinely disturbing. The set design (Michael F. Kurtz) is sparse, modern, cold and efficient and very effective. The scene changes, however, are noisy and long, which is a bigger deal than most people realize. The staging is effective, with workers sitting in straight rows dramatizing the dehumanization of this world. The loudspeaker announcements are particularly creepy, with two female voices speaking in unison with a non-human pseudo-pleasantness.

There are some good performances as well. Natily Blair is particularly touching as Julia, the wife of Winston Smith (Daniel Rappaport), whose love for him casts her in the role of rebel. The scene in which she models a dress she purchased on the black market and brings him real coffee and sugar while he reads a book about the revolution is just good theater. Mary Holmstrom is the perfect corporate sycophant (Parsons), mindlessly repeating the party line while a hatred of it brews deep inside after she is betrayed by her daughter (Jennifer Stokes). David Marantz is diabolical as O'Brien, the Big Brother honcho who "outs" Winston and Julia.

1984 is a wonderfully bold experiment. When it works, it works beautifully. Hopefully, Nicu's Spoon will continue to develop this piece into a lively, exciting piece of theater, and continue fighting the good fight. While this production didn't entirely succeed, the work they are doing is passionate, professional and absolutely worth keeping an eye on.

**Based on George Orwell's 1984**

**Adapted by Robert Owens, Wilton E. Hall, Jr. and William A. Miles, Jr.**

**Directed by Stephanie Barton-Farcas**

**Producing Company: Nicu's Spoon**

**Bank Street Theater**

**155 Bank Street**

**April 10 - April 27**

**Wed-Sat at 8:00**

**Sundays at 4:00**