

HOT TUB

Swimming to Broadway

Plunging in—barely—with “Red Speedo”

Full disclosure: It wasn't the costume—a snug splash of Spandex—that lured me to New York's East Village recently to see the play “Red Speedo.” I mean, what's another barely clad body here in the Naked City? And it wasn't the rave reviews for playwright Lucas Hnath's deep dive into sports doping, a modern morality tale about money and fame in the fast lane. Awfully close to the undercurrents in today's political theater. Nope, I went for the pool—a 40-foot Plexiglas lap lane that may have been the first to stretch across a Manhattan stage. “Hamilton” doesn't have one.

So along with some swim buddies, I headed to the New York Theatre Workshop, where the whiff of chlorine from the jewel box of blue made us wish we'd brought our goggles. We sat in the second row (heeding the ticket office's warning that we'd get wet any closer) and I coveted a quick plunge. Not since Dustin Hoffman's character in “The Graduate” hid at the bottom of his family pool had a tank of water contained such promise.

Unfortunately, there was even less swimming than swimsuit: just a few strokes by hunky lead Alex Breaux, 30,

as the drama began. “My legs are so long and the pool so narrow, I would have literally drenched the first two rows,” he tells me apologetically a few days later. “I have a pretty mean kick!” Still, the cool pool concocted by set designer Riccardo Hernandez changed the dynamic for the entire cast, a provocative presence that kept them all on edge in the make-believe gym.

Breaux, a 6-foot-3-inch tall former Harvard football player, followed a grueling regimen to whittle his 195-pound heft into the perfect upside-down triangle of an Olympic hopeful. His itsy-bitsy outfit also had to be custom carved, in three separate fittings. “I had too much butt” for the readymade suits, he confesses, laughing at his “cheek overflow.” Just in case, he wore a padded undergarment, a hedge against wardrobe malfunctions during 80 minutes onstage in nothing but. Not, he agreed, a lot of wiggle room. As one admiring critic wrote, “Rarely has an actor had to do so much while wearing so little.”

To enhance the illusion, Breaux channeled Michael Phelps's proportions (tugging the Speedo south for a longer torso) and Ryan Lochte's persona (“kind of a

surfer dude”), creating a zoned-out athlete who struggled to express his dreams of Olympic glory on deck, but was “incredibly articulate underwater, in a flow zone where he's present but not conscious.” Breaux even shaved down every Monday, developing “great respect for all the women out there, and the problem areas: knees, ankles.”

“I think it's about the potential of the pool,” Breaux explains, acknowledging its strong, silent role. And although it didn't deliver either true love (“I haven't had any swimsuits thrown at me yet!”) or an invitation to Nationals (“Even if I look it, I wouldn't hold up for 100 meters!”), he will surely surface on Broadway after his gold-medal performance. On stage and off, when one of your co-stars is a swimming pool, you can go way beyond the flow.—LYNN SHERR

5-7-5

*Sun shines on water;
I swim back and forth, at peace.
Thinking of nothing.*

—Joan Walbaum, *Colonials* 1776

COACH

BY ED COLLEY

