

CHICAGO

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

Kate Black-Spence plays Bella in *Rabbit*.

Once upon a time not long ago, young men bragged to each other about their sexual conquests, boasting of their own prowess in the bedroom and freely comparing their female partners' anatomies. But in British playwright Nina Raine's *Rabbit*, receiving its Chicago premiere at **Stage Left Theatre** April 20–May 26, the tables are turned. In this alternately raucous and probing comedy-

drama from 2006 (earning renewed interest in the wake of Raine's successful *Tribes*), it's the women—in particular Bella, a Londoner celebrating her 29th birthday with attractive friends of both genders, including two ex-boyfriends—who are notably less than discreet when it comes to kissing and telling.

“The play investigates how sexually aggressive women have become in the 21st century and how that's added a whole new

dynamic to dating—not necessarily in a way that's emasculating for the guys, but the roles are now confused,” says director Elly Green, a transplant from London to Chicago who consulted in person with the playwright during a recent trip back home. “The play looks at the effects of feminism and post-feminism on the self-image of these women. It asks women of the current generation: Are we moving forward with the gains our mothers fought for, or is there a backlash?”

Stage Left ensemble member Kate Black-Spence, who plays Bella, agrees. “It's a play about gender politics in a world where nobody's sure how to move forward anymore. Women have evolved to a place where they feel like they can talk about sex, including the fact that they have multiple partners, what the guy's ‘package’ looks like and so forth. It's not all as crass as that, but it's an important aspect of the play, which you don't see discussed in TV and movies. Men used to make all the choices, and now the women are making the choices, but that isn't necessarily making them happy. It's a huge step for women in the sexual revolution, but has it gone too far?”

—Kevin Nance

ST. LOUIS, MO.

SMASHING THE BEAT

“I'M PASSIONATE ABOUT EMCEEING and the art of storytelling...this is part of my story,” writes Michael Bordner, referring to a YouTube video of him performing his original song “If There Was Such a Thing,” from his play *Smash/Hit!* Steve Broadnax, the show's co-writer, was inspired after listening to Bordner's personal stories from Iraq. “He shared with me his war stories and I was moved beyond measure,” he recalls. *Smash/Hit!* premieres this month, and plays through May 18, at **St. Louis Black Repertory Company**. The story, which took six years to travel from Broadnax's notebook to its Black Rep premiere, is about an Iraq war veteran who tackles the arrhythmic imprints of PTSD with the synco-poem narrative of hip-hop. But, as the hook warns us, crossing into the world of hip-hop can be as treacherous as crossing enemy lines.

—Georgina Escobar

AUSTIN

Fugit Hora, Memento Mori

WE MORE OFTEN DISCUSS THEATRE'S EPHEMERAL NATURE THAN DWEL on our own mortality. But in Steve Moore's *Adam Sultan*, which runs through April 19 at **Salvage Vanguard Theater** as part of Austin's **Fusebox Festival**, death and theatre are intricately intertwined.

While volunteering at Chicago's Field Museum, Moore was inspired by the million-plus jars in its biology collection, containing everything from eels to beetles to seaweed. Though the objects were dead, Moore was fascinated by how the jars were “a particular version of death where the whole purpose is to point really eagerly at life.” Thinking about his own community of friends and theatre artists in Austin, Moore began to wonder: “What will be the dead things that someday point at the lives we're living now?”

Adam Sultan is a real-life Austinite—a musician, composer, dancer, writer, performer and teacher, and he plays his affable self in the eponymously named show. Only the year is 2052 and Adam, now an octogenarian, has become cantankerous. His wife, along with many of his friends, has passed away. His community has come apart but he keeps collecting an archive of jars filled with objects of the dead.

Meanwhile, hooded puppeteers recite a roll call of real-life Austinites and their imagined causes of death. Leading up to performances, “Jar Parties” were held wherein community members brought important objects and gave interviews about the object's significance and regrets they may have later in life. The parties, which hosted a couple of hundred people at a time, were merry but maudlin affairs. “They were fun parties,” admits Moore, “but they also felt like communal wakes for a bunch of people who are still alive.” —Eliza Bent

Some jars from *Adam Sultan*.