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Liz Magic Laser Delivers a Hilarious Parody of a News Broadcast With "Bystander" at The Kitchen

BY LEIGH SILVER MAR 28. 2014



Image via *The Kitchen*

If you go to **The Kitchen** to see **Liz Magic Laser's** newest show, "**Bystander**," this weekend, expect to be on camera. The performance and video artist, who was the commissioned artist for the Armory Show last year, likes to bring everyday people into her pieces. For the Armory Show, she conducted and filmed six focus groups to determine how she should lend her identity to the art fair. In "**Bystander**," which is based off of a television newscast, (often reluctant) audience members answer questions from real newscasters.

Liz Magic Laser has set up *The Kitchen* like a television studio, with two professionals (former WWOR-TV reporter **Maria Trice** and former KEYT-TV weatherman **Jon Wright**) sitting behind a desk and one (NY1's **Roger Clark**) "on the scene," which in this case means, in the audience.

While Trice and Wright deliver the news—which ranges from the **Chris Christie** scandal to the unrest in Ukraine—their "show" is projected on a screen above them. When they cut to Clark, he asks audience members their opinions with open-ended questions like "Have you ever waited for something for a long time?" referring to the deadly Atlanta traffic jam earlier this year. One audience member said "Christmas." This too, is projected on the looming screen.

Three audience members are really actors planted in the stands, played by **Audrey Crabtree**, **Annie Fox**, and **Michael Wiener**. They are outraged that the newscasters and audience members refuse to

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discuss the hard facts, instead delivering personal anecdotes. The planted actors assert their own opinions, which turn out to be more truthful versions of the news. Their bold statements make the rest of us look like chickens.

The comical, low budget news show, with poor graphics and awkward lines works perfectly to deconstruct the professionalism newscasters usually exhibit. One of the funniest parts of "Bystander" is **Lynn Berg's** performance. Berg delivers soundbites from famous people (Obama, Putin, and even Heidegger), by standing in front of a green screen of their images and reading quotes. His role shows how useless such information is taken out of context.

While the piece is hilarious and exciting—you never know what people will say next or if you will be put on the spot by Clark—it seems outdated. The performance asserts that we shouldn't trust newscasters and journalists with blind faith. But this is not how we consume media anymore. With the rise of social media (especially Twitter), we seek out the news, and we discuss it with a greater online community. Through the Internet, news gets distilled through thousands of opinions; it is not just delivered to us unmediated by professionals. Also, we have the power to be more active about what we consume.

Presented as a play from five to 10 years ago, this performance would make more sense. Still, by putting the audience in the spotlight, it shows how reluctant we are to express our own opinions about current topics in front of other people. It just goes to show that we need the Internet.

"Bystander" runs until March 29 at The Kitchen in New York.