



## Actor Under Fire



The wonderful actor James Gleason has written a one-person play about his experiences during Vietnam. He calls it "Actor Under Fire". It took him thirty-eight years but the result is an engaging study of what happens when art and war interconnect. Gleason traces his early life when he was trying to decide what to do about being drafted. He had toyed with being an actor and then a priest. His mom liked the idea of having a priest in the family but his father attitude was more like "you have got to be kidding" only stated with more disdain. So Gleason decided to visit his local recruiter who promised him he could do a touring show as an actor so he signs up for the Air Force. He was sent to Vietnam as an M.P. but grabbed a chance to tour in *Star Spangled Girl* by Neil Simon.

Gleason's adventure doing "Star Spangled Girl" are hilarious. His play is peppered with colorful characters and wild situations. Imagine performing for a group of soldiers who only wanted to see strip tease or performing in a monsoon. Along the way he learned something about acting, himself, and war. Gleason toured all over Vietnam but finally finds himself in a graveyard where he discovers that some of the characters he has met along the way are victims of that pointless war. The play has been well directed by Anita Khanzadian who uses slides and three black cubes to set the stage.

There are many very funny and also touching moments in the piece. One of my favorites is his homecoming to his father. His father was a Vet from World War II and loved to tell his stories about landing on Omaha Beach and fighting for the duration of the war. When Gleason confronts him on his return from Vietnam he doesn't go into his acting adventure but rather tells of his chance meetings with people along the way and their subsequent deaths. Gleason dedicates the play to "the men and women on the wall" He earns his father's respect and the experience makes a man of him. It also makes him an actor. He ends the play with a salute. I salute him for sharing this tale. "Actor Under Fire" plays until Dec 21 at the Sherry Theatre in North Hollywood.