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A Lesson in Proper Bow-Fluffing Technique

Reviewed By Madeleine Shaner

"A Lesson in Proper Bow-Fluffing Technique"

presented by Storey Productions/Moving Arts at Praxis Studios,
729 N. Fairfax Ave., L.A. Wed.-Thu. 8 p.m., Sun. 2 p.m.
Dec. 1-23. \$12-15. (213) 622-8906.

In case you wanted to know everything there was to know about bow-fluffing but were afraid to ask, Trey Nichols does it all for you. Nichols, a bow-fluffer who works as an actor between holiday season gigs, tells some of his war stories as a customer service rep in a busy mall department store. Along with his ability to soothe savage customers, he has perfected an enviable gift for turning flat-packed ribbon bows into beautiful rosettes to decorate gift packages. This is something not everyone can do, especially, as Nichols finds out to his horror, the four developmentally disabled youths who are dropped off for rehabilitation at the customer service department one busy day in December. With lost keys, missing children, gift-wrapping, returns, and endless customer complaints to occupy him, a harried seasonal worker doesn't need the assistance of a quartet of amateur bow-fluffer whose hearts are not in it.

In his amusing solo show, directed by Lee Costello, Nichols relives one memorable day just before Christmas when he manages to tick off just about everyone on his gift list, including the floor manager, security, the credit department, a very big girl who wants to sit on Santa's lap, a number of overworked moms, a blubbing balloon-seeking baby boy, a few petty mall crooks, several agitated seniors, and of course the four several-thumbed amateur fluffers.

Bow-fluffing is a very serious business: You have to pull out the loops in a practiced but simple movement, first backwards, then forwards, but always absolutely evenly. The amiable Nichols would appear to be the least likely person to lose his cool when his little realm seems about to topple, but the pressure of turning out perfect bows and keeping the holiday-shopping public appeased would try the patience of a saint. Facing a crisis of faith, the Fluffer has to choose between happy bows or expediency. One man's experience in the consumer culture trenches takes several hilarious and tragic turns before it becomes just a painful memory that Nichols happily mines for a very funny one-man show. To which we can only say: Keep on fluffing!