

## Alum brings unique play to stage



NYU alumnus Dan Kitrosser's new play "Dead Special Crabs" ties his own neuroses to a whirlwind physical comedy ripe with homoerotic tension, a mystery serial killer, accidental incest and a manic cross-country journey down I-95 from Maine to Florida. Currently running Off-Off-Broadway at TBG Theatre, the production offers an unabashedly strange yet enjoyable plot.

Kitrosser grew up in Philadelphia, where both his mother and father were lawyers. On the weekends, though, clowning around was quite literally the family pastime.

His father Neil is a magician and a clown. Until age 14, Kitrosser and his older brother Jeff performed routines with their father at synagogue functions. Neil was "Juggles the Clown," his older brother Jeff was "Noodles" and little Dan was too young to wear makeup, so he was the ringmaster, "Monsieur Dumbo-bo."

"Of course, I was the one not wearing makeup, and I was the one who turned out gay," Kitrosser said. "It was work — we stayed up late. I remember being so exhausted."

The clowning proved to be a boon for Kitrosser's work ethic. Before he received a Master's in playwriting at The New School this year, he worked full-time in his 20s as a children's storyteller. But he learned children are a tough crowd.

"Kids will literally stand up, say 'I don't like this,' and walk away," Kitrosser said. "I learned very quickly that you have to keep an audience engaged."

He never stopped writing — Kitrosser's children's musical "Night of the Butterfly" received a 2009 Off-Broadway run. Fox recently optioned his 2013 New York Fringe Festival play "The Mumbblings," which is about a straight woman married to a gay man.

"Dead Special Crabs" retains the self-aware weirdness of his past plays. At a rehearsal on a rainy Sunday in October, actress Ellen David as Aunt Missy proclaimed to her nephew Loomer, "You couldn't catch crabs with a \$4 whore." Equally hilarious quips are peppered throughout the performance. Director Kristin Skye Hoffman possesses a sharp eye for keeping the actor's movements in check with the world created in the play.

Kitrosser's stage directions call for blocking that utilizes sold-fashioned slapstick humor, as well as ever-changing minimalist scenery. It is a road trip, after all. But Kitrosser has not driven a car since he left Philadelphia in 2002. After getting his license at age 18, a minor accident before leaving for college at NYU caused Kitrosser to swear off driving, although he still has vivid dreams about it.

"I think this has a lot to do with the fact that this play has a lot of driving in it," Kitrosser said.

Driving is not the only personal element of the play for Kitrosser.

"All these characters are completely naïve to their own self," Kitrosser said. "They're meeting themselves every day."

With influences from his colorful life shown clearly in his work, Kitrosser is meeting himself, too.

"Dead Special Crabs" is playing at TBG Theatre, 312 W. 36th St. through Dec. 6.

*A version of this article appeared in the Wednesday, Nov. 19 print edition. Email Kaitlyn Mitchell at [theater@nyunews.com](mailto:theater@nyunews.com).*

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