

Run out of . . . SKY . . .

By Leslie Bramm

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...Leslie Bramm's unusual short play, RUN OUT OF SKY (a play for three voices), is a little like experiencing a post-modern mile high club in one act, but with a plane, not on one. Before you start thinking that airplanes might actually make fantastic sexual partners with their extensive listening skills and sleek yet sturdy design, you need to know that the aviation themed relationship is metaphorical and that it's about to take a nosedive. RUN OUT OF SKY chronicles a doomed relationship through the voices of three female Air Traffic Controllers trying to keep a compromised aircraft in the sky. The playwright builds tension with the controller's voices sharing the narrative of setting the plane on its course, building to a tumultuous and primal ascent, and then desperately trying to stay on course when everything careens out of control. The writing is taut. It's slick. It's visceral. And now it's time to fasten those seatbelts because it looks like we're going to hit some turbulence. #airplane, #air, #relationships, #infidelity, #whatajerk, #probablyshouldnotbereadingthisonaplane*

CONTROLLER 3

She feels a plummet in her gut, the G force builds...

Spacing is playwright's own.

RUN OUT OF SKY

(a play for three voices)

CHARACTERS

3 female Air Traffic Controllers. They each wear a headset. They are up-lit with an eerie green glow on their faces, as if radar were tracking their emotions. They are spaced far apart, and never speak to each other.

TIME

Now.

*At rise: Single SPOTLIGHT on all 3
CONTROLLERS*

CONTROLLER 1

She's heavy on take off, but ascends to cruising altitude with average turbulence, autopilot is switched on...

CONTROLLER 2

Everyone seated safely, dreaming of destinations.

CONTROLLER 3

280 souls, counting crew.

CONTROLLER 1

Radio chatter, routine, nothing to indicate a problem.

CONTROLLER 3

A beautiful day..."Severe clear".

CONTROLLER 2

Blip...

CONTROLLER 1

Blip...A pulse on my radar, a number and a flight plan...

CONTROLLER 2

875,000 pounds, with a full payload, 6 million pieces and parts, 3 stories high, 300 foot wing span, two Rolls Royce turbines...

CONTROLLER 1

The sun gleams off her wings as her nose nudges the heavens.

CONTROLLER 3

She's buoyed by the thermals, and in return she gives the sky a diamond, a crisscrossing, necklace of a thousand daily flights.

CONTROLLER 1

Wires, wings, and weight, all wed triumphantly.

CONTROLLER 3

Her relationship with the sky- invictus!

CONTROLLER 2

An aircraft, any aircraft, even in a freefall, a nose dive, a roll, even if she's inverted, can pull up, level off, adjust her attitude, balance herself on the horizon and right her course...

CONTROLLER 1

As long as she doesn't...

CONTROLLER 2

Just as long as she doesn't...

CONTROLLER 1&2 (together)

"Run out of sky"!

CONTROLLER 2

The night "before" we do what we do. Have dinner, laugh at the antics of the dog, watch another episode of that show. "We" even make love.

CONTROLLER 3

We are two bodies knowing know where and how to touch.

CONTROLLER 1

Two bodies fit together.

CONTROLLER 3

He moves inside me, fills me, I wrap around, pull from him.

CONTROLLER 2

A quiver, a shudder, then he floods me lovely...

CONTROLLER 1

I absorb him...

CONTROLLER 3

My body surrenders, tingling waves of color turn me inside out.

CONTROLLER 1

We breathe into each other, one heart passed between two bodies.

CONTROLLER 2

We are two bodies safe, comfortable....We are two bodies consistent...

CONTROLLER 1

Blip...

CONTROLLER 3

Usually as he...Usually he'll hesitate, look me in the eyes.

CONTROLLER 1

Not tonight.

CONTROLLER 2

Tonight...

CONTROLLER 1

Tonight his face is buried in my shoulder.

CONTROLLER 3

He's sobbing. I haven't seen him cry in...Actually, I don't remember the last time I see him cry.

CONTROLLER 1

I hold him. Kiss the top of his head. This release more profound.

CONTROLLER 2

When he's upset he's reticent. Whatever's bothering him, I have to coax, pull out of him.

CONTROLLER 3

Tears out of the blue?...He doesn't do that.

CONTROLLER 2

Suddenly, in my gut...

CONTROLLER 1

Suddenly, I can't explain...

CONTROLLER 3

In my gut, suddenly there's this...

CONTROLLER 2&3 (together)

A sinking speed.

CONTROLLER 3

A pulse on my radar, a blip moving across my screen...

CONTROLLER 1

BRM 1-3-8...BRM flight1-3-8 please respond...BRM please...

CONTROLLER 2

There's no may-day, no report of a computer malfunction, no squawk with the cockpit. She's there one moment and then...

CONTROLLER 1

Blip...

CONTROLLER 2

A failure of the systems to communicate.

CONTROLLER 3

It's never just one thing, a single element that causes a crash...

CONTROLLER 1

A series of catastrophic failures...

CONTROLLER 3

Connect, over-lap, build on top of each other...

CONTROLLER 2

They reach a point of critical mass...

CONTROLLER 1

Blip.

CONTROLLER 2

If she goes down uncontrolled, at that height and speed, she'll reach 100 Gs in a matter of seconds.

CONTROLLER 3

All those bodies gelatinous, all those souls hopelessly turned inside out.

CONTROLLER 1

The burn scar will be minimal, the earth will absorb her, swallow her whole. The debris field concentrated. Parts of people, in pieces, no larger than a book of matches...

CONTROLLER 2

"Sudden impact with terrain".

CONTROLLER 1

The next morning, it's Sunday, his turn to bring coffee. We lay there, waking up together, as we do, as we've done, for a life-time of Sundays.

CONTROLLER 3
He's not a morning person, but there's too much silence now.

CONTROLLER 1
A silence, gliding.

CONTROLLER 2
The first "critical failure".

CONTROLLER 1
He's acting strange, distant, like he's beginning to fade away.

CONTROLLER 2
I sit next to him. Take his hand...What is it?...What? Tell me.

CONTROLLER 1
Look at me...He doesn't, he can't...He won't...

CONTROLLER 3
He moves away. Sits in a different chair, get's up, paces, sits back down...

CONTROLLER 1
Just talk to me.

CONTROLLER 2
He glances at me, then away.

CONTROLLER 1
Second critical failure.

CONTROLLER 3
She feels a plummet in her gut, the G force builds...

CONTROLLER 1
Then he says...

CONTROLLER 2
In a tiny voice...

CONTROLLER 1
"I've fallen in love"...

CONTROLLER 3
Blip...

CONTROLLER 2

“With someone else and”...

CONTROLLER 1

Blip...

CONTROLLER 3

And, “WE” want to pursue it.

CONTROLLER 2

You’re kidding? I mean, he must be, this must be...

CONTROLLER 3

This can’t be for real.

CONTROLLER 2

Mayday!

CONTROLLER 1

He’s serious. Very...Serious...Serious like I’ve never seen him.

CONTROLLER 2

Say again...Read back please...Verify...

CONTROLLER 3

“WE”...“WE” want to?

CONTROLLER 1

I get out of bed strangely, calm, pull a coat on over my pajamas, leash up the dog, grab the cigarettes that he hates, and fly out into the cold morning.

CONTROLLER 3

A ripping wind sheer, frost shivering across her wings, hypoxia sets in.

CONTROLLER 2

The altitude makes her dizzy.

CONTROLLER 3

She stalls for a moment then has to re-fire her engines.

CONTROLLER 1

My father’s death, the accident with the tree, losing his job, finding the job of his dreams, buying this home, our “we”.

CONTROLLER 3

Our WE, a lifetime of details.

CONTROLLER 1

When I get back, later, he's dressed, sitting in the living room, staring at the top of his socks.

CONTROLLER 2

He's made another pot of coffee, and cooked breakfast. I think this is incredibly sweet, considering...The bacon is like a "beacon", and this is his way of trying to relocate me.

CONTROLLER 3

Like WE were preparing for a siege. Like there is an outside force that WE need to defeat. WE would figure this out, together.

CONTROLLER 2

We both sit there in each other's presence. In each other's company. In each other's feelings, the way you do when words don't seem enough.

CONTROLLER 1

He keeps gripping the rug with his toes. Grabbing, like he's holding on for dear life.

CONTROLLER 2

Our WE had rolled, inverted. Our WE had become just "me".

CONTROLLER 3

Is there...I mean do you...The two of you...Is there a plan...

CONTROLLER 1

Can we talk...I mean, can we make this make sense, see what went wrong, make a mid-air correction, get "us" back on course?

CONTROLLER 3

I love you. Maybe I haven't said it, shown it enough, but I do.

CONTROLLER 2

Suddenly his phone rings...

CONTROLLER 1

It's her!

CONTROLLER 3

I see her voice all over his face...He'll let it go to voice mail. Try to make this awkward moment a little less so. He'll let it go to voice mail because deep down...

CONTROLLER 2

He wants to pull up, level off, right our course. He'll let it go to voice mail because some part of him, some part that he's lost or forgotten, some part of him still...

CONTROLLER 3

"Hello"...His voice is a low mumble as he walks into the bedroom, and sits on our bed.

CONTROLLER 2

I can hear her voice, soft. Little covert rumbles.

CONTROLLER 3

Each molecule of air around my head explodes.

CONTROLLER 1

A minute. Five minutes. 10 minutes, they keep chattering.

CONTROLLER 2

I'm sick. I go to the bathroom. I have to vomit...nothing. I splash water...I see the metal fatigue. The tiny tears on the skin of the fuselage.

CONTROLLER 3

This cruel???

CONTROLLER 1

If there had been a system failure the pilot would have communicated, there would have been a conversation, an attempt to fix things.

CONTROLLER 2

What ever happened was abrupt, sudden. She went down before anyone could do anything.

CONTROLLER 3

I never thought...

CONTROLLER 2

Never would have guessed...

CONTROLLER 1

This cruel...

CONTROLLER 3

This cruel, to me?

CONTROLLER 2

I scream at him...

ENOUGH!!!

CONTROLLER 3

He hangs up, walks by me like...

CONTROLLER 1

Wait! Stop! How long have you been...I mean, the two of you, how long have you...

CONTROLLER 3

"She doesn't want to, as long as you didn't know...She wanted me to tell you first. She wasn't going to sleep with a married man".

CONTROLLER 1

But, you are a married man...

CONTROLLER 2

You know what I mean. "Married", that kind of married.

CONTROLLER 3

What kind of married? What kind of married?

CONTROLLER 1

The kind of married we used to be.

CONTROLLER 2

She wasn't going to have sex with my husband until I knew?

CONTROLLER 1

The noble...

CONTROLLER 3

Self-righteous...

CONTROLLER 2

Goddamn holier-than-tho...

CONTROLLER 1

BITCH!

CONTROLLER 1,2,3 (together)

He's found someone who's more complete than I am.

CONTROLLER 3

CONTROLLER 2

Tonight I would be here, in our apartment alone, as I would remain.

CONTROLLER 1

He would find himself with her, in her, full, and falling in love.

CONTROLLER 3

A pulsating blip on my radar, tracking across a grid, a flicker, then she's gone.

CONTROLLER 2

Blip...

CONTROLLER 3

I never knew something could hurt this much.

CONTROLLER 2

Blip...

CONTROLLER 1

A flicker, a blip, a pulse on my screen...

CONTROLLER 3

Blip.

CONTROLLER 2

A flicker...

CONTROLLER 3

Hurt in a way, to a degree, that only falling in love can heal.

CONTROLLER 1

A blip, a flicker, and then...

CONTROLLER 3

She's gone.

CONTROLLER 2

She's gone.

CONTROLLER 3

She's gone.

CONTROLLER 1

A blip and then she's gone.

(BLACK OUT)

End of play

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS... *I wanted to write a poem for the stage. Something highly stylized that uses the strength of metaphor.*

AUTHOR BIO: Leslie Bramm is the author of over 20 plays which have been produced, work-shopped and/or developed, regionally, internationally, off-Broadway, and independently by Variations Theatre Group, Three Crows Theatre, The Present Company, The Penobscot Theatre, The Actor's Theatre of Louisville, Emerging Artists, Theatre, Nicu's Spoon, The Edward Albee Last Frontier Conference, Rattle Stick, Reverie Productions, Playwrights Horizons/Tisch, Shelter Theatre Group, Gold Coast Theatre, Theatre La Monde, The Province Town Players, IATI Theatre, The Actors Studio and the Colorado Fine Arts Center. Bramm is the recipient of a Stanley Drama Award (Oswald's Backyard) A Paul T. Nolan Award (Islands of Repair) A Tennessee Williams Literary Award (Big Ball) and is a two-time finalist for the O'Neill Conference. Bramm is a member of the Dramatist Guild, and the Actors Studio Playwright/Directors Workshop. His play A.B.C. was banned from the curriculum at SUNY college.