

URGENT & CONFIDENTIAL: Dean Cameron's Nigerian Spam Scam Scam

Sacred Fools Theater

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It's hard to imagine that anyone still falls for the famous Nigerian scam which promises of huge sums of money (most recently \$700 million USD!), which the writer will share with you for facilitating the release of these "frozen" assets. It's even harder to imagine that anyone has not received one of the hundreds of versions of this letter. Most of us just hit "Delete", but I suspect that many of us have, at some point, been tempted to respond just to give them a piece of our minds.

Which is exactly with Dean Cameron did when he received the "I am Dr. Mrs. Mariam Abacha" version of the letter. Between jobs and bored, he responded to the plea by writing, "Great, do you have toast?". Thus began what is reportedly actual correspondence between Mr. Cameron, and Mrs. Marian Abacha and her son Ibrahim (both played by Victor Isaac), which as of this telling has been going on for 11 months and shows no signs of stopping.

Mr. Cameron gleefully engages the scammers by adopting the flamboyantly psychotic persona of a wealthy fey Floridian who speaks in non-sequiturs, has a fetish for avocados and cats, and lives with a hairless Thai houseboy - all fictional. This "Scam Cameron" shares recipes with Mariam and Ibrahim, as well as photos of his feline "children" (downloaded internet pictures which are projected on a screen between the two actors), discusses the heartbreak of a spastic colon, and professes undying love for Mariam, all the while stringing the duo along with promises of sending them money to help them in their plight. On occasion, the lights dim and we are treated to actual recorded telephone conversations between Ibrahim, Dean and Dean's "lawyers" (Perry Mason and Owen Marshall, counselor-at-law). At one point he even forwards a competing scam letter to Ibrahim, who duly warns him not to trust anything from Nigeria because there is a lot of dishonesty there. In what is probably the most brilliant - and satisfying - twist of the entire scam, Dean manages to convince Ibrahim to send him \$1 as a symbol of his sincerity after reporting to that the other scammers have sent him \$100 as proof of their good will.

While greatly entertaining, and gratifying in a voyeuristic sort of way, Urgent and Confidential is more of a skit than it is a play. Cameron's writing is indeed witty, imaginative and demented, and the topic timely, but neither the story nor the characters have an arc. Cameron moves in and out of character to address the audience with lightning agility, and his Floridian Scam Cameron is a highly entertaining maelstrom of verbosity, and Isaac weaves back and forth between mother and son with great dexterity. But none of the characters goes anywhere: Cameron begins and ends trying to outmaneuver Ibrahim/Mariam with his enervating flights of fancy, and Ibrahim/Mariam continue trying to extort money from Cameron. Director Paul Provenza missed an opportunity to really make it interesting by allowing Ibrahim/Mariam to reach a true state of bewilderment and frustration, or of letting Cameron lose himself permanently in Scam Cameron. Instead, Cameron has upped the ante in real life by sending the duo DHL packages filled with nonsense

(items provided by the audience, such as restaurant menus and electric drumsticks). This is, in the end, a battle of endurance and stubbornness which is of far more interest to the participants than it is to the viewers, an entertaining yet detached reporting of an ongoing - and possibly eternal - tug of war.