



# The Oil Boiler: A Multimedia Multi-Sensory Experience

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By Steve Walker

Like the crack of a champagne bottle against the bow of a ship, a menagerie of actors, artists and musicians are launching a new performance space within the skeleton of a an old car showroom this weekend. Called The Living Room, it's the newest venue in the Crossroads District to house a mix of performance styles. And when the yet unnamed company invited reporters down to the space for a preview recently, KCUR's Steve Walker took the bait.

"Welcome to the Juggler," says Cody Wyoming. "To some people, I'm the preacher. As I look around, say, 'Good evening, preacher.'"

Crowd: "Good evening, preacher."

Dressed in a white tuxedo jacket that's both tacky and retro, musician Cody Wyoming is setting the stage for a handful of guests invited to a sneak preview of a new performance piece that premieres this weekend at The Living Room.

"It's a special night at our club we call 'The Oil Boiler,' a dramatic foray into a story with which many of you are unfamiliar," says Wyoming. "But as the old saying goes: Dark rooms are often lit by twisted bulbs and sordid twisted tales illuminate the dark recesses of the soul."



*Crawford Architect's James Pastine, set designer for "The Oil Boiler," sits to watch a run through of the performance.*

The show is called "The Oil Boiler," a 55-minute multi-sensory experience resulting from a collaboration of Kansas City artists of all stripes. Its earliest outline was written by Tyson Schroeder, a visual artist, and Alacartoon's Christian Hankel.

Among the theater artists represented are actors Walter Coppage and Katie Gilchrist, and from the film "Up in the Air," Erin McGrane.

Ambling up to the microphone for a smoky, jazzy contribution, dressed in a slinky black dress, is Shay Estes who sings, "This dime store novel/Is frightfully boring/..."

In between songs, something looking like a narrative rears its head.

Walter Coppage: “Get to the point already.”

Tyson Schroeder: “Does there need to be a point to create art?”

Katie Gilchrist: “Oh, do shut up. This is supposed to be entertainment, not some art school seminar on high brow vs. low brow, how does it fit into the existential equation. Blah, blah, blah. Nobody (bleep)ing cares.”

The run through is raw and unfiltered yet focused. But if there’s no traditional play within miles of the space this night, there’s a healthy respect for how these artists of various disciplines collaborate.

Dressed in a tutu and striped, Tim Burton-ish tights, Erin McGrane explains why “The Oil Boiler,” in Kansas City, at this time.

“Part of what’s different is the spirit of collaboration,” says McGrane. “Number one, you just can’t do this in other cities – the space, no budget. It’s amazing we can do this in KC effortlessly, and that’s what makes it a valuable artistic town.”

If Shay Estes is more comfortable around jazz than theater, you wouldn’t know it.

“If you look at the people who work in this city, they don’t isolate their talent to just one arena,” says Estes. “You are capable as an artist of stretching yourself out and taking risks, not financial risks but artistic risks.”

Though “The Oil Boiler” comes and goes over one weekend, The Living Room will stage another play later this month. Its structure is more orthodox, but audiences will take it in while sitting not in theater seats but big, cushy sofas.