

## Contemporary American Theatre Company Production Reviews

### **'Evie's Waltz' a genuine thriller without the cliches**

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THEATER REVIEW: Columbus Dispatch By [Michael Grossberg](#)

*Evie's Waltz*, to its credit, isn't like most thrillers.

Many on screen or on the page attempt to stimulate jaded audiences with overkill. But playwright Carter Lewis disdains convoluted plots, wide-ranging conspiracies, massive explosions, supervillains and James Bond-style heroes who save the world -- albeit after much of it gets blown up.

In *Evie's Waltz*, which opened last night in the Riffe Center 's Studio Two Theatre, Lewis uses deft characterization, smart dialogue and artful economy to shape a genuine thriller that doesn't need any of those now-cliched bells and whistles.

Contemporary American Theatre Company's gripping area premiere creeps up on the audience like a cat about to pounce, and then enlists the audience's imagination to dramatize the kill.

Only four characters shape the brisk one-act, suggested for mature audiences because of profanity.

Agitated but feisty, savvy but evasive, Caitlin Morris plays the wounded title character. Here is a thoroughly modern teenager infatuated with the romantic drama that she's acting out, a la *Romeo and Juliet*. Or is she acting?

As Evie, Danny's girlfriend, Morris becomes the focal point of concern and increasing consternation by Clay and Gloria, Danny's parents.

Busy setting up a backyard barbecue at their suburban home when Evie shows up, a bit bloody but unbowed, Clay and Gloria only gradually realize that their son may be in deeper trouble than suggested by his suspension that day from high school because of a threat of violence.

Mandy Fox, as Gloria, and Ralph Scott, as Clay, plunge into Lewis' overlapping and often-amusing dialogue like Martha and George from Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

But more is at stake here than their bruised marriage. And as Gloria and Clay realize the threat to their family and future, their anguish becomes palpable in a well-matched performance.

Lewis ultimately reveals his women to be stronger than his men, but gives all his characters a convincing humanity.

Director Ed Vaughan adds nuance, balance, a brisk pace that pauses when surging emotion needs to surface and a shimmering depth that often hints at the characters' unspoken feelings.

Danny, in particular, comes through vividly in this production.

Yet, no single actor can be praised for that distinct accomplishment, because the son remains a hovering presence throughout - unseen, unheard and entirely offstage from Stephanie Gerckens' stone-patio set.

Danny's pivotal personality is entirely evoked through the capable cast, Keya Myers-Alkire's jolting sound design and Lewis' aptly descriptive writing, which was inspired by the spate of school shootings in recent years.

Like any good thriller or mystery, this one keeps the audience guessing -- and flinching -- until the final cathartic scene.

Few thrillers are attempted onstage, and fewer succeed. But Lewis wisely enlists the audience's imagination to explore the roots of today's teen violence.

The play offers no easy answers, but sheds a cautiously hopeful light on the anxieties of parents and children in an increasingly chaotic world.