

Curtain Calls: Center Rep piece with 'Storytelling Ability'

By Sally Hogarty

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Center Rep opened its "Off-Center" series recently with Carter Lewis' provocative piece "The Storytelling Ability of a Boy." Performed in the Leshar Center's smallest theater, the series allows the company to present more cutting-edge plays that might have a smaller draw.

Lewis' work follows Caitlin, a young teacher new to a rural high school. With plenty of secrets of her own, Caitlin befriends two extremely intelligent, difficult students. Alternating between vulnerable and volatile, the teens (Dora and Peck) put Caitlin in one compromising situation after another.

Jessica Heidt directs a fast-paced 80-minute production (no intermission) featuring El Beh (Caitlin), Monique Halen (Dora) and Jeremy Kahn (Peck). The three make for a tight ensemble as they slowly reveal their damaged inner selves. Full of teenage angst, the language is very raw at times as the teens challenge themselves and their teacher.

While capturing the turbulence of adolescence, it can be a difficult play to watch at times, especially Dora's self-destructive nature. But Lewis also adds heavy doses of humor, albeit usually sarcastic, to counter the negativity.

The actors do a terrific job creating such characters as Peck, a gifted storyteller harassed by his fellow students; Dora, an angry, aggressive young woman; and Caitlin, a recently divorced teacher trying to escape her past. A lovely treat is a scene where Peck finds Caitlin's cello and Dora forces her to play it. As Caitlin plays an incredibly emotional, gut-wrenching piece, Dora's angry shield lowers showing the vulnerability within.

A very important fourth character is Nina Ball's incredible set. Her classroom walls of school lockers transform into Caitlin's apartment with each locker opening to reveal a window, a lamp, or best of all, the teacher's desk magically transforming into a couch -- all enhanced by Ray Oppenheimer's lighting design.

"The Storytelling Ability of a Boy" continues through Nov. 13. Call 935-943-SHOW or go to www.lesherartscenter.org