

New Jersey Repertory Theatre Production Review

Evie's Waltz

A *CurtainUp* New Jersey Review

By [Simon Saltzman](#)

You have a few years of invincibility left, Evie, but only a few. The process of dying is the bulk of your life and it's much more frightening than a bullet, because it's a subtle undetectable morphine-drip-of-a-fear that's always there - unless you're drunk or religious, which, by the way, are also two peas of the same pod. — Gloria



Rear: Warren Kelley, Kate Kenney;
Front - Andrea Gallo
(Photo: SuzAnne Barabas)

Although it's been ten years since the Columbine High School massacre, there has been a lot of subsequent speculation on what drove two angry and alienated teenagers to that point. In his 2003 film *Elephant*, film-maker Gus Van Sant coolly and brilliantly extracted aspects of that horrific incident without drawing any conclusions. Carter W. Lewis's fictional play *Evie's Waltz* is similarly committed, if not in the specifics to that very real and troubling event, to explore the potential for teenage rage. While this is a very harrowing and unnerving play, it has been well directed by SuzAnne Barabas with an eye on bringing credence to its characters (even an unseen antagonist) and creating and sustaining suspense to the bitter end.

The veggie shish kabobs may be ready to be placed on the patio grill, but Clay (Warren Kelley) and Gloria (Andrea Gallo) Matthews are not quite ready for the ordeal they are about to endure. Their immediate concern is how to cope with the increasingly incorrigible behavior of their son Danny, a junior in high school who has been suspended from school for possessing a gun. There's a familiarity to the kind of parental bickering they are engaged in as Clay tends to evade the darker side to Danny's behavior. Gloria is more sarcastic by nature and takes an angrier less forgiving stand with Danny who has become increasingly uncommunicative.

The question of what to do about Danny's clearly anti-social behavior becomes temporarily moot with the arrival of Danny's girl friend Evie (Kate Kenney), who arrives like a storm trooper in camouflage pants and combat boots, her tattooed arms, fuchsia streaked hair and bare midriff adding to her rebel look. Evie, who happens to live next door, has apparently not only abetted Danny in his purchase of the gun on the internet but also admits to Clay and Gloria that Danny has drawn floor plans of the school in his locker.

What gives the play its most illuminating if also disconcerting perspective is the way Evie takes on Danny's case—justifying, explaining, excusing and defending the young man she professes to love. As Evie, Kenney takes full charge of the drama's dynamics, using her body as an infuriated force of nature. She gives a wild and wacky depiction of hostility. But it is through her that we get to understand how the humiliations and frustrations that Danny has endured at school have provoked him. Soon enough, we realize Danny is watching these three from a critical vantage point and that their lives are endangered.

Both Kelley and Gallo are believable as the distressed parents who cannot come to terms with their son's behavior. Danny's love of Strauss waltzes adds an ominous touch to the climactic scene, but to explain more would undermine an important plot device. The play, which also includes the revelation of an off-stage tragedy and an extra-marital affair, has more than enough conflict and contrivance to sustain its 85 in real-time minutes.

Evie's Waltz is having its New Jersey premiere as part of a project "rolling premieres," in which several stage companies across the country present their own productions of new and worthy plays.