

Geva Theatre Production Reviews

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Magan Wiles is focal point of Geva's Nextstage drama

By Marcia Morphy

The Nextstage production of Evie's Waltz is no shot in the dark.

Instead it takes perfect aim at Danny, a 16-year-old teenager who buys a gun on the Internet to settle a bullying dispute. He is suspended from school for "carrying," along with his girlfriend Evie, leaving their parents racked with guilt.

The play begins as a casual barbecue in the backyard suburban home of Clay (Skip Greer) and Gloria (Annie Fitzpatrick), who are discussing the aftermath while waiting for Evie's mom, Sandy, to arrive for a tête à tête. Clay is both Mr. Nice Guy and Mr. Fix It, who believes in his son and thinks coordinated parental action is key; Gloria is uncompromising and furious at this complete "stranger" who is living upstairs.

As the grill sizzles, so does the action. Evie (Magan Wiles) bursts in on the scene, announces her mother is drunk, and soon we realize she is the one who is truly calling all the shots as she communicates through text messages with the unseen Danny, who is armed and now hiding out in the nearby woods.

Bit by bit Evie downloads insight into the real Danny — how he was teased at school, his anger at her smoking habit, their love for each other and enjoyment of waltzing to the music of Johann Strauss.

All hands hit the deck when gunshots ring out like staccato punctuation marks. Is this target practice or a Tristan and Isolde remake where two lovers are destined to die?

The answers lie within playwright Carter W. Lewis, who weaves patterns from strands of chaos and rivets the audience to their seats for 80 minutes of gripping suspense. But it's the actors who truly give Evie's Waltz credence under the sensitive direction of Tim Ocel.

Although Greer is positioned in an understated role that could have easily been erased from the plot, his completely natural body language and genuine concern as the mediator is palpable and endearing.

Meanwhile, an underlying anger drives Fitzpatrick to drink and act as one tough, embittered mom. She's fascinating to watch as she tumbles down the emotional rabbit hole of denial to acceptance to love. Her shining moment takes place during a heartfelt voice message to her son.

But it's Wiles as the surly Evie who blew me away from the get-go — a tension builder in one small package. She is the little girl lost, the teenager from hell and every parent's nightmare. Wiles made me squirm in my seat; she is that good.

As for the play, it's a character dance like no other: Not a waltz, but more like the last tango between life and death. It leaves us with no real answers — perhaps because there are none — but it does hit home.