

Evie's Waltz

Reviewed by Chris Gibson
KDHX-FM

Carter Lewis has written a play that pointedly addresses issues about our current society, focusing his attention specifically on the recent shootings that have occurred on campuses across the country. *Evie's Waltz* is powerful and thought provoking entertainment that may raise more questions than it answers, but does achieve the important goal of sparking a dialogue. The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis is giving this important work its world premiere in the Studio Theatre of the Loretto-Hilton, and it's a must-see event that will make parents squirm with anxiety over the possibilities it portrays.

When Clay and Gloria's sixteen year old son Danny brings a handgun that he and his girlfriend Evie purchased online to school one day, it sets in motion a series of events that would seem headed toward a tragic conclusion. But nothing is cut and dry here. As concerned parents they decide to invite Evie's mother Sandy to dinner on their patio to discuss the matter. But Evie shows up instead, with traces of blood noticeable on her neck, telling the pair that her mother was too drunk to make it, and sent her in her place. Soon enough, she reveals that Danny is not upstairs, confined to his room, but in the trees just out of their line of sight with a hunting rifle, and he makes his presence known with a few well-aimed shots.

Magan Wiles is simply riveting as Evie. She skillfully captures the contrasts between Evie's youthful bravado and her tender vulnerability. Her body language and mannerisms combine to effortlessly convey Evie's age as well. Late in the play, when Evie is alone for a bit with Gloria, she opens up to her and seems to be coming around. But in an instant she reverts back to her brash behavior. Wiles plays the moment with a honesty that's shockingly realistic.

Ted Deasy is strong as Danny's concerned father, Clay. Early on he displays the classic symptoms of someone who's read too much psychobabble on permissive parenting, and thinks he can somehow rationalize his son's decision to choose this violent path. But, as reality sets in, his sense of logic and reason fails him.

Anne Fitzpatrick is perfect as Gloria, projecting the exact opposite image of Clay, delivering brittle and tart responses to his arguments. But that's a facade that conceals her love for a son who's rejected her attention and left her embittered. Her verbal sparring with Wiles crackles with the emotion of a woman pushed to the brink, and desperately searching for some measure of truth she can cling to.

Andrea Urice's direction is superb with smart staging, taut characterizations and a steady pace. A palpable tension builds over the course of its 75 minutes, and though it may not pay off in traditional fashion, it succeeds by confounding expectations. Rob Koharchick's backyard patio set design feels real, right down to the sizzling grill. John Wylie's lighting heightens the tension with a filter that duplicates the scope of a rifle. Rusty Wandall's sound design blends gunshots with Strauss to create an eerie effect.

While there are no easy answers to be found in this play, it's essential viewing because it makes you take notice of the problem, and that's the first step toward actually finding a solution, or at

least determining a cause.