

'Storytelling Ability of a Boy' tautly directed, dazzlingly performed at Florida Stage

By [JAN SJOSTROM](#)

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Occasionally, a play comes along that combines daring structure with compelling characters, gorgeous language, wit and a riveting story. *The Storytelling Ability of a Boy* is such a play.

The one-act play, which is premiering at Florida Stage in Manalapan in a Louis Tyrrell-helmed production, is the fourth work by Carter Lewis the theater has produced. In this tautly directed and dazzlingly performed production, Lewis shows himself to be a playwright in his prime.

His topic is the collision between a talented oddball and the abusive forces that could compel him to self-destruct.

The story centers on Peck, a 17-year-old with a genius for spinning tales out of the moment. He's also an outcast and a punching bag for the bullies at his school. His only friend is Dora, a feisty terrier of a girl as much on the periphery as he is. Caitlin, a new teacher with a troubled past, intervenes between this tight-knit duo, intending only to encourage Peck's writing. But she quickly gets caught up in a high-stakes game in which no one is allowed to keep their distance.

Note for the squeamish — the show includes profanity and explicit sexual references.

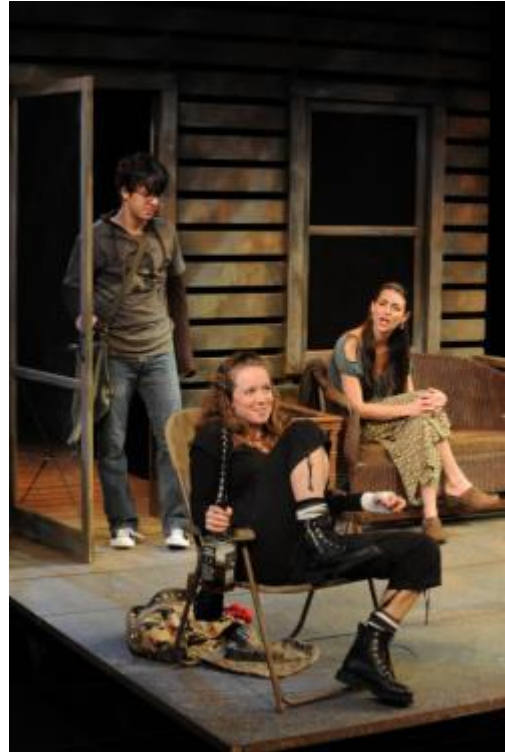
The ending, capped by an exultant sample from Luciano Pavarotti, strays into the bombastic. Something less definitive and homey would better match the play's tone. The demise of a character in Caitlin's past is also difficult to swallow.

That aside, the playwright makes an uplifting case for the power of creative expression that's reinforced by the play's structure.

Sometimes the script approaches the abstract quality of music as images pile up and voices vie for primacy. The characters simultaneously recount and shape events with words that recall magical incantations.

Thanks to flawless casting, the brilliant, prickly characters are almost too hot to handle, and their flashes of vulnerability are so sharp they're like a knife to the heart.

Marshall Paillet masterfully performs the waterfalls of performance poetry that pour from Peck — essential if the play is to cast its spell. Bethany Anne Lind burns brightly as Dora. Laura Carbonell's sylphlike Caitlin is intensely human as she struggles to retain a precarious control.



Ken Jacques Photography

[\(enlarge photo\)](#)

Marshall Paillet (Peck), Bethany Anne Lind (Dora) and Laura Carbonell (Caitlin) star in *The Storytelling Ability of a Boy* at Florida Stage.

If You Go

- What: *The Storytelling Ability of a Boy*
- Where: Florida Stage, 262 S. Ocean Blvd., Manalapan
- When: Through Jan. 17
- For more information: 585-3433 or www.floridastage.org

Victor Becker's set economically establishes the world of the play. Erin Amico's costumes are spot-on, and Matt Kelly's soundscape rounds out Peck's tales like an orchestra backing a soloist in a concerto.

This is a play that shows Florida Stage at its best as the thoughtful incubator of meaningful theater.