

## The Storytelling Ability of a Boy, Capitol Rep, CA Production Reviews

### **Review: 'Storytelling Ability of a Boy' a compelling look at teen angst – Center Repertory Theatre, CA.**

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As I'm watching "The Storytelling Ability of a Boy," thrumming in the background like tropical music at a tiki bar is the phrase, "I'm glad I'm not a kid anymore, I'm glad I'm not a kid anymore, I'm glad I'm not ... ."

The words come not as a screed against the younger generation, but as a mantra of profound relief. I'm sitting in the black box theater at Walnut Creek's Leshner Center watching the grandchildren, or maybe great-grandchildren, of J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield go through their painful dance.

Yeah, they're freer, more profane, more sexually aware, perhaps even a bit wiser than Holden and his predecessors. They are kids impotently railing against the man, or the woman, or the doggone vice principal as they live out those precious last years of adolescence before they become adults, have kids and start the cycle of repression all over again.

There has probably never been a kid who hasn't felt totally misunderstood and repressed at some point, or rejected by peers because they are smarter, uglier, fatter, thinner, poorer, richer or in possession of some psychic prom night zit that will last through adolescence.

The youths in question here are Dora (Monique Hafen) and Peck (Jeremy Kahn) who cluster, reluctantly, beneath the wing of teacher Caitlin (El Beh), who is in the midst of her first year at a rural Midwestern school after leaving a larger high school where a tragedy took place.

She has taken Peck under her wing because he is a troubled young man who is also an amazingly gifted writer persecuted by those intimidated by brains and no particular brawn. Dora comes in for the ride because she is Peck's best friend and troubled in her own right. And, eventually, she and Caitlin must combine to save the lives of both Peck and themselves.

All three actors deliver playwright Carter W. Lewis' sometimes overwrought lines beautifully. Hafen wears a guise of tough implacability quite comfortably, but it serves only as imperfect armor for a girl confused in so many ways. Kahn uses his glibness and facility with words to mask his fear and frustration. Both create truly memorable characters.

Beh creates a character that seems duty bound to present herself as an in-control teacher, eager to help her young charges. But she slowly reveals herself as a soulful person nearly as out of control as her younger friends.

The story is told part of the time in a sort of prose style that seems to be spilling unbridled from a printed page, a very effective stylistic tool from Lewis.

The language and some subject matter may be a bit rough for youngsters. But Lewis' American Critics Circle Award-winning play presents a compelling and engaging take on adolescence in the show's West Coast premiere.

Nina Ball's deceptively simple set, made mostly of tumbled-down school lockers, is more complex than it seems at first blush, and is remarkably flexible. Michael A. Berg's contemporary costumes are subtle but quite apt for the setting.