

## Compelling *Storytelling* at Florida Stage Three misfits desperately try to find their place in a hostile world



Bethany Lind, Marshall Paillet and Laura Carbonell star in *The Storytelling Ability of a Boy* at the Florida Stage in Manalapan. (SigVision, courtesy)

By Bill Hirschman Special Correspondent

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A fresh-faced teenager clad in black blithely takes a nail gun out of her purse, puts her arm up against the schoolyard wall and fires a brad into her hand in a half-crucifixion. Then she tosses droll barbs at a parade of uncaring classmates passing by.

Dora is just one of the three disaffected and emotionally damaged misfits desperately trying to find their place in a cold, hostile world in [Florida Stage's](#) world premiere of Carter W. Lewis' *The Storytelling Ability of a Boy*.

At once funny, tragic and hopeful, *Storytelling* depicts a young teacher with a closet of secrets (Laura Carbonell) trying to nurture a 17-year-old nerd with a stunning gift for inventive storytelling and poetic prose (Marshall Paillet) and his best friend, a ferocious spirit in agony (Bethany Anne Lind). Bullies, family nightmares, sexual confusion and adolescence in general collide synergistically until violence threatens to destroy all three.

Lewis addresses the visceral reality under the cliches when a "troubled" teen brings a rifle to school. But *Storytelling* goes far beyond and beneath some ripped-from-the-headlines tale. Lewis has created teens so bright, quick-witted and articulate that it frightens you to see such intelligence unimpeded by maturity and aggravated by profound emotional trauma. They use words as both defensive and offensive weapons, but mostly as tools for blunting pain and for keeping human beings from getting too close. They seek out societal correctness only to better identify a target to blow up in revenge.

Under Louis Tyrrell's sensitive direction, it's an unabashedly theatrical evening with such touches as sound effects that only the boy hears in his head as he narrates his stories to the teacher.

Carbonell provides a solid incarnation, but it's not an electric performance. Since her character is an equal partner in this triangle and our surrogate/guide, that robs the play of a driving force and makes us wonder erroneously why the boy is not clearly the solo focus.

Paillet delivers Lewis' gloriously profligate language with a seamless ease and makes his quirky, tortured soul totally believable rather than melodramatic or contrived.

But it's Lind who soars. She makes the most of Lewis' complex heroine, a foul-mouthed truth teller who prods and

pokes at the wounds she perceives with a preternatural power of observations. She will stay with you long after the house lights come up.

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