

## ***Evie's Waltz***

-- Robert Boyd, Repertory Theater of St. Louis

The current production in the Studio Series at the Repertory Theater of St. Louis, the world premiere of *Evie's Waltz*, by Carter Lewis, creates more seat-squirming tension than any play I've seen since Marsha Norman's *Night, Mother*. Mr. Lewis is a master at choreographing the twists and turns of his three-person dance so that even during moments of apparent comic relief—of which there are a several—the tension continues to build. By the play's literally stunning penultimate moment, the audience is so caught up in the event that even press night regulars could be heard gasping.

Clay and Gloria, such archetypal urban liberals that we can almost—almost—predict their reactions at first, appear on the privacy-fenced patio of their comfortable home. They are preparing to grill veggie kebabs to feed themselves and Sandy, a neighbor and the mother of their son Danny's girlfriend, Evie. The two young people have been suspended for bringing a gun to school, but neither Clay nor Gloria is prepared to admit that the situation is dire—a prank, they assume, or a misunderstanding. Certainly nothing that can't be cleared up by coordinated parental action.

Instead of Sandy, though, Evie bursts through the gate, claiming at first that her mother, who drinks more than a little, is "resting." Evie, whose attitude and attire label her as a rebel, is not ready to let things be settled so easily. As the tension builds about exactly what her agenda is and what power she might wield to enforce attention to it, revelations about the two families and about the two young people unfold like the layers of an onion, getting closer and closer to what threatens to be a disastrous moment of truth.

In retrospect, the skill with which Mr. Lewis weaves Johann Strauss and his music into a story about what might have been—and still might be—a bloody massacre is more than impressive, and the scene just before the climactic moment, when in the thick of the almost unbearable tension Evie drags Clay into a waltz, lingers in the memory long after the theater has gone dark.

Director Andrea Urice, who has worked with Mr. Lewis previously, directs this intricate play with great insight and attention to pacing. Her cast—Ted Deasy as Clay, Annie Fitzpatrick as Gloria, and the angelic-looking Magan Wiles as the devilish Evie—make a strong ensemble; particularly effective are the passages in which Evie confronts Gloria about her role as a mother, with both women learning hard lessons as the argument unfolds.

Rob Koharchik has created a richly naturalistic set, and Dorothy Marshall Englis has dressed the characters, especially Evie, with convincing attention to detail. John Wylie's lighting makes a major contribution to the play's dramatic effectiveness.

Without giving the plot away, it is necessary to say that the special effects, for which no one is specifically credited, but which sound designer Rusty Wandall surely has a lot to do with, are astonishingly effective. One effect, in particular, is so good that it comes within an eyelash of upstaging the action, and I still haven't figured out how they did it.

In short, this production of *Evie's Waltz* by Carter W. Lewis is another demonstration of the Rep's power to do things right, a beautifully realized piece of theater that reaches toward the core of a real and crucial problem. It will run through November 9th in the Studio space; for tickets, call 314-968-4925, or visit [www.repstl.org](http://www.repstl.org) <<http://www.repstl.org>> .