

# Theater: 'Boys' bruised, while 'Blackbird' soared

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Courtesy photo

The City Pulse theater reviewers see upwards of 50 shows a year, which means that by the end of the year many of the productions are a blur. The standouts, the ones that eventually grab up fistfuls of Pulsar nominations and wins, are typically plays that have a lasting emotional impact.

There were two stunning pieces in 2011 that still haunt me. The first was Michigan State University's "Good Boys and True," performed in the former Chrome Cat space during the Renegade Theatre Festival in Old Town. The play addresses the fallout of a sex scandal at an exclusive prep school: One selfish, stupid sexcapade by popular senior Brandon (Wes Haskell) has far-lasting repercussions. Being young, dumb and full of — ahem — stuff, Brandon believes that he can escape the situation unscathed by sheer charm and lacks empathy for damage he has done to his family, the girl he victimized and the reputation of his school.

Doak Bloss and Angela Mishler examined the aftermath of a relationship between a man and a 12-year-old girl in Peppermint Creek Theatre Co.'s "Blackbird."

Director Rob Roznowski designed a minimal production, with no set and few props to distract audiences from the compelling script and sharp acting. The cast, including Dana Brazil, Leslie Hull and Andrew Harvey, was phenomenal.

Maybe there is something about the space, or maybe it is just a coincidence, but the second biggest gut-punch of a play, Peppermint Creek Theatre Co.'s "Blackbird," also took place in the former Chrome Cat. This two-character, one-act play portrays the unhappy reunion of two former lovers. The conflict arises in that Una (Angela Mishler) was only 12 years old when the relationship took place, and Ray (Doak Bloss) was 40.

"Blackbird" takes on a whole new level of creepy in the wake of the Jerry Sandusky scandal, and one wonders if Peppermint Creek or director Lela Ivey would have changed their selection if the scandal had occurred before the play. Knowing Ivey, probably not. Conversations about the play would certainly have been very different in the context of current events. "Blackbird" delves into the question of whether Ray would be clinically classified as a pedophile. His situation is not nearly as cut and dried as the Sandusky case.

The two plays make terrific bookends. "Boys" introduces a tragic situation that the audience knows will have lasting repercussions for all involved, while in "Blackbird" we see that long-term emotional toll. What happens in between provides job security to many mental health professionals.

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