

Wednesday, December 28, 2011

Theater: Stormfield's 'Heroes' was a triumph

by UTE VON DER HEYDEN



My favorite show of 2011 was Stormfield Theatre's "Heroes," a play in which all the major elements of what makes fine theater came perfectly together. Based on a French play by Gerald Sibleyras and translated by Tom Stoppard, it is the sometimes funny, sometimes sad, sometimes absurd story of three old World War I soldiers with a dream and scheme to escape the shackles of their veterans home.

Foremost, there was the brilliant acting of Richard Marlatt, Gary Houston and Richard Henzel, all three professionals obviously at the top of their game, and the thoughtful direction of Stormfield founder Kristine Thatcher. These four, however, did not stand alone. They were superbly supported by Kirk Domer's beautiful set and by the inventive lighting, costume and sound designs by Tim Fox, Holly Iler and Sergei Kvitko, respectively.

The journalist in me at first resisted naming "Heroes" as best of the year because of my personal connection to Stormfield (my husband serves on the theater's board of directors), but hey, this is what's true for me. "Heroes": a shining gem.

A close second was Peppermint Creek Theatre Co.'s "Blackbird," by David Harrower, a complex look at child sexual abuse/pedophilia and its lifelong effects. Choosing this play was a raw act of courage by Peppermint's artistic director Chad Badgero and equally so by director Lela Ivey and its two actors, Doak Bloss and Angela Mishler, who had to execute a confronting, often frightening script.

Mishler was riveting as the abused child/woman and Doak Bloss unforgettable as the possible abuser. Always a consummate actor, "Blackbird" was Bloss' best work this year and perhaps of his entire theater career.

Also outstanding was director Rob Roznowski's "A Streetcar Named Desire," produced by the Michigan State University Department of Theatre. One of the elements that made this "Streetcar" so stunning is that director Rob Roznowski stayed true to the classic poetry of playwright Tennessee Williams' words while at the same time giving the audience a feeling of never having seen this play before. Honest, fleshed-out performances by Christina Traiser as Blanche and Curran Jacobs as Stanley added to the power of this production.

I also loved Williamston Theatre's wildly successful "And the Creek Don't Rise." Quirky, smart and touching, it was pure enjoyment grounded in the talents of playwright Joseph Zettelmaier; director Joseph Albright; actors Thomas D. Mahard, John Lepard and Kate Peckham and a crew (Daniel C. Walker, Reid G. Johnson, Holly Iler, and Will Myers) that delivered a spotless production in the arenas of set design, lighting, costumes and sound.

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