

War and Remembrance: “Time Stands Still,” at the Village Theatre through September 25

Written by Thom White

Monday, 19 September 2011 06:00

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I quite appreciate the way Kimberly Furness and Eddie Staver III work with tension, using silence, emotional distance, anger, and passionate desire, among other acting tools, to portray the intensity (or lack thereof) in their onstage relationships. Their violent, sometimes stunted, oftentimes broken, yet undeniably sensual connection in both the Curtainbox Theatre Company's *Danny & the Deep Blue Sea* in 2008 and *Fool for Love* in 2010 was breathtaking to watch. And while their current efforts in

Time Stands Still

are much more subtle, they're no less dramatic. Instead of their stunning physical work in the previous two shows, Furness' and Staver's performances here rely on the verbal and emotional aspects of their relationship, one superbly crafted by these gifted actors.

Furness plays Sarah Goodwin, a photojournalist who has just returned home after being severely injured by a roadside bomb while documenting the war in Iraq. Staver is James Dodd, Sarah's boyfriend of eight-and-a-half years, who's riddled with guilt for having left Sarah alone in Iraq prior to the accident. Playwright Donald Margulies' work is an examination of how seeing the acts and impact of war changes this couple, both individually and as partners, by exploring how Sarah and James cope with their experiences, and what those experiences have done to their relationship.



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I will admit that the plot description is not one that piqued my interest. But having seen the play – and the way director Tyson Danner beautifully handles the material with an emphasis on the characters and their thoughts and feelings – I would now regret not having seen it based on its synopsis. Margulies’ script is riveting and thought-provoking for its emotion and for the variety of personality he puts into his characters. It is easy to connect with them, to sympathize with them, and to find something relatable in at least one, if not all, of these people.

With Furness, it’s tough to avoid an emotional connection. Her Sarah’s feelings are palpable, as if Furness is in full control of the mood and tone of the entire theatre space. The sensation in the air changes in an instant, it seems, as Furness’ anger fills the room, and the same is true of her tension, her passion, and her friendly familiarity, as if we in the audience are actually living her emotions.

In contrast, Staver’s feelings as James are often hard to read, as the actor impressively portrays his character’s suppression and avoidance of directly dealing with his internal issues. His James puts on an amiable game face in an attempt at normalcy, and consequently delivers what may be, after many remarkable roles, the most subtle work I’ve seen from Staver since 2008’s *Life’s a Dream* with the Prentie Players.

I could similarly praise *Reader* employee Mike Schulz, whose turn as Sarah’s photo editor and the couple’s friend, Richard Ehrlich, is the most unaffected I’ve observed from him. That’s not to say that any of Schulz’s previous work, much of it with the Curtainbox, has been at all bad.

Relative to his work in last year’s

Art or Hedda Gabler, however,

Schulz’s stage presence here seems fully natural, as if his lines and movements were unplanned. While there’s certainly thought to the “why” and “how” behind his lines, we don’t see the effort; they just come out seemingly organically. This is most notable in how Schulz changes his vocal delivery depending on the situation or relationship, from Richard’s slower and sweeter speaking style with girlfriend Mandy Bloom, to his excited, rapid flow of words while enjoying a playful conversation with Sarah and James.



For her part, I wanted to chuck Jessica Denney’s Mandy out of the window, because the performer was so effectively annoying with her bubbly, dimwitted,

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needs-to-edit-herself-before-she-speaks presence in her character’s initial scene. Playing the *m uch*

younger girlfriend of Richard, Denney makes it clear that her Mandy is at a lower, less-wise level of life experience than the rest of the characters. Yet while almost (appropriately) intolerable at first, Mandy eventually becomes the catalyst for Sarah’s and James’ self-examinations and contemplations of what it is they do for a living, and her Mandy grows on you, endearing herself to the audience while doing the same to Sarah and James.

Time Stands Still continues something of a tradition for me with Curtainbox productions, in that, as I watch one of the company’s plays, I end up examining my own life. While always entertained, I am also consistently inspired to contemplate who I am as a person, a friend, a romantic partner, or some other aspect of my being. And this show – one I might have passed over due to its plot description – may end up changing who I am more than any of the theatre company’s previous works.

For tickets and information, call (563)322-8504 or visit TheCurtainbox.com .