



Nocturne: -- edgy, offbeat experimental theater on Stage2

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By THOM MOLYNEAUX of The Montclair Times

Stage2 at Luna Stage is an intimate performance space, seating fewer than 50 people, with a complete lighting and sound system that could be the “little theater that could” — the little theater that could be the home for off-beat, experimental, controversial or risky plays.

There are worthy, even important, scripts and performance pieces that have a limited audience appeal but should be produced for the sake of that select audience — and for the growth and nourishment of that “fabulous invalid” theater itself.

Stage2 might be the base, in terms of space and budget, for making the theatrically idiosyncratic, economically feasible. It might even be the place for older plays whose content or format wouldn't draw a large general audience today. How about an evening of one-acts, by Chekov, O'Casey and Tennessee Williams?

This season's inaugural production in Stage2 is “Nocturne,” a vividly theatrical production of an unusual script by Adam Rapp, one of the hottest of the young writers and directors on the current theater and film scene. As I understand it, the most unusual aspect of the script is its format. On the page it looks like a long short story. There's no indication of who is speaking these words (assuming they are being spoken), where they are when they speak them or who they are talking to. The playwright doesn't even indicate how many actors should be involved or what characters they would play. Is it a long one-act monologue? Is it a two-act story theater piece with a small cast acting and miming all the characters? Do the actors sing and dance? Where are the scene breaks? Rapp has left everything but the actual words up to the discretion and imagination of the director.

“Nocturne” is the harrowing tale of a young man who, at the age of 15, accidentally and gruesomely kills his younger sister. It recounts the impact of her death on his relationship with his mother and father, his running away from home, and his struggle for survival in New York. Finally, it examines his success and failure as a writer and his impotence both as a writer and as a man.

Director Juan Souki has brought Adam Rapp's words to the stage by first splitting the leading character and narrator of the story into two. He is listed in the program as Man 2 (Oliver Henzler) and Man 1 (Cary Gant). Souki has also brought in two actresses, Sistine Giordino and Lindsey Beeman, to play, or narrate, two important characters in the story, the Sister and the Redheaded Girl. Around these four actors, he's woven a wonderful theatrical design. He's shaped his particular vision of "Nocturne" via Carrie Yacono's dramatic lighting design, an effective use of slides and projections and an evocative sound track (Marcelo Anez) of music, voices and natural and ethereal sounds that stream in the background throughout the play.

This is Experimental Theatre so the natural question is "Is the experiment a success?" The answer is "Not completely."

As interesting and even riveting as some of the director's choices are, I think they too often keep the story and the characters at a distance. The choices don't seem to make the text clearer or bring us closer to experiencing the story. There is no urgency or need for Man 1 or Man 2 to connect with us. No problem that this night, in this theater, the audience can solve.

Ultimately, this "Nocturne" turns out to be a kind of edgy, story theater with the story arbitrarily broken up into parts for four actors (and the recorded voices of actors). And although the actor's performances are energetic, focused and entertaining — these are four very talented people — they seem abstract, existing alongside the text, not coming out of it.

"Nocturne" by Adam Rapp runs through Dec. 10, on Stage2 at Luna Stage, 695 Bloomfield Ave. Tickets range from \$20 to \$30 with special rates available for seniors and students. Performances are on Thursdays at 7:30 p.m.; Fridays at 8 p.m.; and Sundays at 2 p.m. For reservations and information, call 973-744-3309 or visit online at www.lunastage.org.