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Theater Review: 'A Steady Rain' at Guild Hall



JOE PALLISTER AND EDWARD KASSAR IN "A STEADY RAIN." PHOTO: MATHIAS DILL

MARCH 15, 2017 BY BRIAN CUDZILO

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A *Steady Rain* first opened on Broadway in 2009 and has seen several iterations since, the latest at Guild Hall in East Hampton. The one-act play written by Keith Huff, is a dark duologue, in which the show's two characters, Denny and Joey, alternate speaking to the audience, to each other and to a board of inquiry. At its heart, the play is a tale of friendship, loyalty and betrayal in which the audience is left to ponder who is guilty, and of what.

To the surprise of more than one theater-goer the audience was instructed, upon entering the auditorium, to make their way down the center aisle where an usher directed them up onto the stage, where about 60 seats were set up. The only two props used in the production were already on stage: two more chairs, which would be moved by the actors to various points on the stage throughout the performance. If you've never sat on stage during a performance, it certainly makes for an intimate theater experience, and only heightens the drama. As a matter of fact, the audience is sometimes used as a "prop," Denny rhetorically asking one audience member a question, and both actors several times making eye contact with nearby watchers.

This rendition stars Edward Kassir as Denny and Joe Pallister as Joey, two childhood best friends who became Chicago cops with a larger dream of one day becoming Starsky and Hutch. Those dreams are stunted, however, as both are repeatedly passed over for promotion despite claiming higher test scores and longer service time. Denny believes, pointing out those advanced were "a lot more ethnic," it's because of an unstated quota system, blissfully ignoring the reprimands in both of their files for making racist remarks. "Denny and me, knocking around the locker room, might have let slip a rude word or two about the apparent injustice of this unstated quota system," Joey says. Denny attempts to blow the statements off, essentially as locker room talk: "Overhearing something not even intended for their ears," he says.

From there, in the adept hands of Kassir and Pallister—two superlatively talented thespians—a steady drip of drama snowballs down a slippery slope, besieging the partners, spiraling more and more out of control as the show progresses to involve pimps, prostitutes, infidelity, drugs and alcohol, betrayal, police brutality and cannibalism.

When the show was done, this reviewer didn't quite know what to think or how to feel. Perhaps that was the point. Two hard drinking, foul-mouthed Chicago cops with few redeeming qualities, speaking in racist overtones while ridiculing what they see as an unfair quota system, which may or not exist, are not exactly the most lovable characters. That's not to mention that Denny commits two murders, one while on unpaid suspension and in full view of two other cops, then goes home—a privilege certainly unavailable to those cops taking advantage of a quota system.

Under Jenna Mate's skillful direction, *A Steady Rain* takes what

could easily be a cliché—two drunken beat cops facing the moral challenges of modern society—and turns it into something fresh and compelling. The show’s minimalist production two chairs as props, no costume changes, no intermission, the characters never even leaving the stage—allowed the stark reality of the story to take center stage. Throughout the show, audience members are forced to confront themselves; to ask themselves the question, should I feel sorry for these two hopelessly irredeemable characters? Or maybe: What would I do in a situation like theirs?

A Steady Rain plays at Guild Hall, 158 Main Street, East Hampton, through March 19, 2017. Visit guildhall.org for all the details.



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What ever happened to romantic comedies? Why would anyone want to watch foul mouthed cops discuss cannibalism and other hideous topics. No set, no costumes, no budget. Just fools with money for theatre tickets.

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