

Park Cities People

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Writing as Contact Sport

Dougherty shines in Second Thought's Stories

By Patricia Mora
Special Contributor

Collected Stories, exquisitely performed by Second Thought Theatre in Addison, is a delightful reminder that the wick of artistic endeavor burns brightly without regard for geographic location. This production proves you need not book a flight to Manhattan to be instructed by ears and eyes, and thus reoriented, by the spectacular poignancy of drama.

Pam Dougherty, a doyenne of the Dallas theater scene, emanates both heat and light in a performance so wrenching that I marvel that she could do it yet another time for yet another audience.

The delivery she deployed on opening night was one impossible to shake. It's no breeze in-breeze out moment of sitting in the dark with a smattering of folk wishing to engage in a bit of artistic dabbling. This is battle.

In the play written by Donald Margulies, Dougherty plays Ruth, an older writer who becomes inordinately, psychologically entwined with Lisa, a gifted protégé, marvelously portrayed by Allison Tolman. The questions posed are many: the role of mentor and student; the appropriation of personal history for literary purposes; and the blurring of truth and fiction in the effort to create literature imbued with grace and luminosity.

"Just the facts ma'am," you might be thinking about now. But there are none that would flare with adequate insight into Margulies' work. One could offer an outlined plot: older writer becomes irate when student makes a work of fiction from stories gleaned from personal exchanges. But that doesn't cover it.

I have a successful writer-friend who willingly refers to herself as a serotonin-challenged Alpha female. Well, Ruth amply fills the bill for what is apparently the stereotype du jour for women laboring over hot typewriters. But, in more exotic terms, Ruth's heyday evokes the New York of the 1950s, of Ginsberg, Berryman, and Delmore Schwartz. Not to mention a garlic-drenched apartment above an Italian restaurant. It's enough to make one long for beatniks and artistic bastions comprised of exposed brick before it was chic.

To say more about Schwartz might give away too much. Ruth keeps her secrets close to her chest and, in fact, friction usually only associated with 40-grit sandpaper ensues when Lisa reveals "history" via the perceived hijacking of information too private and precious to be put to literary use.

But enough. Make the trip to Addison. It's closer than Manhattan, and your time and money couldn't be better spent. I've seen many an off-Broadway show that doesn't hold a candle to this one. Second Thought Theatre is burning brightly these days.

Pack your sunglasses. Dougherty is so completely lucent that the place riots with glare and emotion. Then head for Astoria for a



Courtesy Photo

Pam Dougherty (left) and Allison Tolman, as mentor and protege, face off across the writing table in Second Thought Theatre's Collected Stories.

glass of wine. Pretend you're in the company of New Yorkers, or not. When it's all said and done, and the stories are collected, the company of Texans seems quite perfect after all.