

Stormfield Theatre kicks off with 'Heroes'

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Lansing's 2011-2012 theater season is underway, led off by Lansing's newest professional theater, Stormfield Theatre. Now in its second year at its home in Frandor Shopping Center, Stormfield, headed by artistic director Kristine Thatcher, is dedicated to producing the work of living playwrights. Its season opener is "Heroes" by British playwright Tom Stoppard.

"Heroes" with its brilliant language and insightful characterizations might pass for a Stoppard original, yet actually it's his adaptation of a script titled "Le Vent De Peupliers" by the much younger French playwright Gerald Sibleyras.

So we must credit both writers for a script, which under Thatcher's direction, is by turns, funny, fascinating, and heartbreaking. "Heroes" three characters are elderly veterans of World War I living in a veterans' military hospital in 1959. The action takes place entirely on a hospital terrace, which the three men have taken over as their private domain.

Henri (Richard Henzel), with an injured leg, walks with a cane; Philippe (Richard Marlatt), with a piece of shrapnel in his brain, suffers from seizures; Gustave (Gary Houston) is plagued by delusions.

At first, the play doesn't seem to be going anywhere, as we listen to the three alternately harassing and supporting one another. Yet the complexities of Stoppard's dialogue keeps us involved. But as the action continues, these irascible, but endearing old men draw us into their lives - their frustration with their ailments, the confines of hospital life, and their desperate dreams of escape.

We've seen two of these actors before in Lansing. Henzel has twice come to Stormfield for "Mark Twain's Christmas," and Houston appeared in BoarsHead Theater productions. Yet when we see them in "Heroes," it as if we are seeing them for the first time. The characters they create are totally unique.

Likewise, Marlatt, new to Lansing audiences, endears us to Philippe as he struggles with confusion and sudden blackouts.

Kirk Domer creates loving Gallic detail in his setting of a French terrace, and Sergei Kvitko's sound design with French chamber music also establishes a sense of place and mood.

Stormfield's newest production deserves a "Heroes" welcome.

Go see it

* The show: "Heroes" by Tom Stoppard, adapted from Gerald Sibleyras' "Le Vent De Peupliers"

* The venue: Stormfield Theatre, 201 Morgan Lane, Frandor Shopping Center

* The performances: Thursdays, 7 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 8 p.m. Sundays, 2 p.m. through Sept. 18

* The tickets: \$18-\$24; \$2 off for seniors; students, \$10, at 372-0945 or www.lansingarts.org; also at the door (cash or check only)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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