

Hugging The Shoulder

- Reviewed by Sarah Happel, SoCal Magazine

Hugging The Shoulder takes you on a fast paced drive down the dangerous road of drug addiction. Centered on two brothers, Derrick and Jeremy, the play examines their turbulent and abusive childhood culminating into Jeremy's frightening heroin addiction. Derrick attempts to save his brother in a kidnapping intervention. On Derrick's aimless road trip, Jeremy is forced to detoxify cross-country while confronting his painful past. The characters are honest, unrelenting, and uncompromising while reminiscing their childhood abuse.



Photos of "Hugging The Shoulder" at Ruby Theatre at the Complex. Photos by Anthony Treme. Depicted: Kevin Patrick Murphy is the dark-haired-man; Dan Pawlowski has the receding hairline; Kristen Hall is the woman.

Hugging The Shoulder is not black box theater done well, it's black box theater done excellent. Daniel Pawlowski (Derrick) takes his character through an emotional montage that is relatable, painful, and undoubtedly brilliant. Pawlowski's use of his imagination throughout the various scenes is both convincing and powerful. He walks the fragile line of anger and heart wrenching pain perfectly. A perk of Los Angeles is finding such an incredibly talented actor with this kind of dramatic range in a small black box. Kevin Patrick Murphy (Jeremy) as a heroin addict is ablaze in fury and at his strongest when emotionally vulnerable. The two actors present a believable brother relationship. Kristen Hall (Christy) brings depth and softness to the men while completing the ensemble. I was genuinely moved by the cast's passionate performance and blown away by Daniel Pawlowski.

Director Scott Brown brought a circle of trust around his actors, allowing them a safe space for openness. **The successful marriage between writer and director gives the audience a beautifully grueling performance.**

Designed by Cari Shanks and engineered by Liam Bucci and Anthony Treme, the simplistic set maneuvers into the various scenes easily and effectively. The use of projected street traffic only helps suspend our imagination into this world.

Written by Jerrod Bogard, the dialect is natural and the message blossoms quietly amidst the chaos. Bogard kept his characters honest leading one to believe he must hear dialogue rather than create it. The use of puns like "Walt Dismal World" or while watching a car race, "Gentlemen start your binging" brings authenticity to his dialogue. **Bogard knows his characters and writes them well.**

Hugging The Shoulder is original, moving, and worth its weight in gold. Having debuted in New York in 2006 and produced in Chicago in 2007, this West Coast Premiere is not to be missed.

Hugging The Shoulder plays at the Ruby Theatre at The Complex, October 16-November 23. For tickets call (323) 252-2042.



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