



An Online Entertainment Magazine

Hugging the Shoulder

By Ben Miles



Pawlowski, Murphy, Hall
Photo by Anthony Treme

A road-trip is underway at the Ruby Theatre in Hollywood. It takes place in the form of a play titled *Hugging the Shoulder*, by Jerrod Bogard. Derrick (an emotionally attuned Daniel Pawlowski) and Jeremy (a believably haggard Kevin Patrick Murphy) are brothers. Both in the latter-days of their twenties, the

eldest, Jeremy, is hooked on heroin. Derrick's idea is to "kidnap" his beloved big bro and transport him to nowhere in particular, giving him the opportunity to detoxify in-route. The destination is not geographical but psychological.

Talk about the road to sobriety. *Hugging the Shoulder* mixes the literal and the metaphorical in such a way as to milk our minds of substantive thought and, instead, stun our senses into the doped-up drudgery of the here and now experience of addiction and withdrawal. Playwright Bogard artfully juxtaposes noble needs such as love and security with baser cravings, allowing us to explore the relationship between what we need and what we desire. Of course, the Rolling Stones' classic rock ditty on the subject, "You Can't Always Get What You Want," is inevitably and pleasingly put to use in one scene of brotherly bonding.

Scott Brown directs *Shoulder* with a cinematic eye. This may account for some of the elongated and energy-zapping scene-switches; film can cut-to-the-chase instantaneously; it's not so easy to create that illusion on stage. Suggestion: Find some way of speeding up the interstitial transitions. Using projected images of flowing traffic on various interstate highways, however, does allow us to feel the motion of the

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story as well as putting us in tune with the emotional through-lines and affective fluctuations of the characters.

In addition to the brotherly relationship at the core of *Shoulder*, we also get a glimpse of Jeremy's love--if you can call it that-- interest: the pathetic and poppy-dusted Christy (a heart-wrenching portrayal by Kristen Hall).

Done on a shoestring budget, Cari Shanks' set design is simple but labor intensive. The cast and crew are employed to assemble the scenic apparatuses--including a convincing van-like vehicle with high-beam lights on display, staring into the audience on and off throughout the 90 minute staging.

Hugging the Shoulder is an all-to real-world depiction of affliction, addiction, and uncommon affection. It's not a show for the faint-of-heart; nor is it for children. It is a piece aimed at those who are interested in extreme drama and intense personal and interpersonal conflict.

The show, presented by Filthy Rogue Productions, plays Thursdays and Sundays at 8 p.m., with a 9 p.m. performance on Fridays and Saturdays--at The Ruby Theatre at The Complex--6476 Santa Monica Boulevard, Hollywood. For reservations, dial (323) 252 - 2042. For more information, visit www.filthyrogue.com

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