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Review: Audiences will enjoy getting 'Dirty' with Bas Bleu

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The difference between fiction and nonfiction is so faint, sometimes you don't even realize you've crossed it until it slaps you in the face - or in the case of John Patrick Shanley's play "Dirty Story," until it sticks a ball gag in your mouth.

Crass? Yes, but then again so sometimes is life - crass and ugly and unfair. "Dirty Story," now playing at Bas Bleu Theatre, reveals it all, holds it high above its head and lets everybody get a good, long look at the freak show this circus of a world has become.

Combining one of the most unnaturally natural bedfellows - sex and politics - "Dirty" follows Wanda and Brutus (actors Heather Lawrence and Sotirios Livaditis) as they meet, fight, date, fight and craft sadistic, sexual attacks upon each other.

The crux of the story follows the couple's fight over an apartment - Brutus rented it first but Wanda discovered that her grandfather lived there many years ago and thus is laying claim to it now.

(SPOILER ALERT! Brutus represents Palestine and Wanda represents Israel and the whole sordid mess represents the history of unrest in the Middle East as well as recent attempts by America and its cronies to help.)

Shanley's gift for witty banter and telling it like it is truly shines in "Dirty," where it's not just a battle of the sexes it's a battle of the centuries. As Brutus puts it, "I like to poke open assumptions and let the stink out."

Some might question Bas Bleu's choice of such a controversial and vulgar (the dialogue gets a bit - salty) follow up to the theater's last production, the holiday comedy "Greetings." But the wicked contrast actually makes it even better.

There are no heroes, no happy ending. There is a cowboy in a white hat, but he's not much help. In the first act director Sandi Klug lets Shanley's lines take center stage, avoiding an over constructed staging so the audience can keep up with the whirlwind of witticisms. Try to keep up audiences; but be forewarned, no matter how prepared you are for this play, you'll want to see it at least twice to pick up on all the references used.

Bas Bleu veteran actors Lawrence and Livaditis play off each other wonderfully, like two alley cats battling over the last rotting fish head in the trashcan. Both are starving; both should be able to share; neither is willing to.

Each actor is absorbed so completely by the characters, so convincing in the utter belief that their view is the correct one, that you find yourself feeling a bit like a ping-pong ball - he's right, no she's right, no...

Lawrence, who always turns in a stellar performance, goes from a naïve ingénue in blue jeans to a fatigued-wearing, commando in heels. And Livaditis gives Brutus such a grand arrogance to start, making the slow whittling down of his character almost make you forgive his previous transgressions.

And "Dirty's" brief nude scene, in which Wanda aims a flashlight on Brutus where the sun most definitely does not shine, should net both actors some kind of reward - a cash bonus, therapy, something.

Of course, you can't have the whole dirty political shooting match without the good, old U-S-of-A in there. And it arrives with a hoot and a holler in the form of Frank (played by Kurt Brighton) and an entrance worthy of John Wayne. Well, maybe not John Wayne; maybe Jeb Wayne.

Frank comes in with a swagger and a Smith and Wesson and attempts to make peace between the two warring residents while also feeding his own needs for oil and adoration, of course.

Brighton gives Frank a proper Bush-whacking.

With a cow pie-eatin' grin and a mindless surety, he makes you want to simultaneously roll with laughter and shake with tears over the frighteningly on target satire.

And as Frank's spine- challenged sidekick Watson, Duane Sawyer gives off a nice Tony Blair touch as the moderator who can't stop harkening to the days when he was the head honcho.

The easily offended should avoid this play like Dick Cheney at a hunting party. The rest of you should get your tickets early because this show will sell out fast.

The subject is a political, moral and ethical catastrophe, but "Dirty Story" tells it like it is which, while it still doesn't answer the question at hand, is so wrong it's right.
