

Trouble breathing

By Tom Helma



'Every Breath You Take' delivers strong performances, macabre themes

You may find yourself with shortness of breath — not to mention dry throat, sweaty palms and a rapid heart rate — after experiencing the macabre “Every Breath You Take,” the latest offering from Ixion Theatre.

The world premiere play, by British playwright Graham Farrow, is a takeno-prisoners tale of grief and loss taken to bizarre lengths. Rick Dethleson and Sadonna Croff are the Conways, a bitter and bickering too-long-married couple. They struggle through most of Act One, inconsolable after the death of one child and the mysterious absence of a second son. In the capable hands of Croff and Dethleson, the dialogue crackles and sizzles, making the iconic dysfunctional couple from “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” seem well adjusted by comparison.

Then a plot twist arrives with an urgent knock on the door. A tall and seemingly business-like woman arrives at their house with a cut on her head. Her car has been stolen — or has it? As the car theft story unfolds, we discover that it was a ruse to get into the house. When the woman’s husband arrives, we are presented with the horrible notion that one can consider avenging a loss as a way of resolving a loss.

Miranda Hartmann is the tall and lanky businesswoman, Mrs. Hunter, and Todd Heywood plays her equally diabolical husband, Mr. Hunter. They seethe with outrage. When Mr. Hunter has second thoughts about going ahead with their avenging intent, the sharp knife in the hands of Mrs. Hunter brings Hartmann’s intensity to another level. One cannot ignore it as she gestures, waving it around with frightening intensity, throughout the remainder of the play. One can sense the inevitably — the knife will cut through someone.

Hartmann brings a nearly psychotic intensity to this role, revealing the depths of anguish one can go through when experiencing a loss, trying to figure out who is at fault, who is to blame.

Heywood’s Mr. Hunter, when confronted with the consequences of the couple’s plan, reveals an unexpected burst of compassion, which is ultimately insufficient to turn the tide of the inevitable outcome of the play.

Dethleson and Croff transform into tender souls under duress, revealing a married couple who truly love each other. Mrs. Conway’s tortured emotional state is hard to watch, while Mr. Conway displays an unrelenting bravery even in the midst of physical abuse.

Audience members on Saturday night’s performance were still and silent at the end of the play, not quite sure whether to applaud. Clapping was faint and tentative, despite the obvious skill and talent of the cast, as people tried to get their heads around the play’s tragic ending. Grief and