

A *CurtainUp* Review *Never Tell*

By Julia Furay

*So you're basically trespassing? ---Anne
I wouldn't call it that.--- Hoover.
What would you call it?--- Anne
I don't know. Hanging out. ---Hoover*

The press release for James Christy's new play, *Never tell* asks "What's your dirty little secret? In today's upgraded personal existence, virtual relationships are as common as virtual imaging. Is anything, as it truly seems? Who is one to trust?" The play's exploration of truth and trust revolves around Manny, who's invented a brilliant and innovative computer application, and all his friends and coworkers, who spend much of the play lying, cheating, and stealing.

It's a very cynical piece. Manny is a doormat; everyone else in the play is a jerk willing to do anything for power, love or money. So why are they - and the play itself - so likable?



Mark Setlock as Hoover
(Photo: Broken Watch Theatre Company)

To begin with, there is the cast. Broken Watch Theatre Company is comprised of a group of actors, so it comes as no surprise that their productions feature lots of juicy, complex performances and thoughtful direction. Mark Setlock leads the way as the friendly, charismatic Hoover, who befriends everyone else and generally encourages them to act immorally. On the other end of the spectrum is Manny (Jason Schuchman), the nebbishy computer genius who bears the brunt of much of the dishonest doings. Eva Kaminsky, who plays Manny's unstable ex-girlfriend, gives off a chilly, disturbed air that oozes emotional problems. Matthew Wilkas and Teresa Goding round out this quintet as Manny's married best friends.

Director Drew DeCorleto has elicited engaging performances from the cast, with just enough of a hint of menace to keep us guessing about who's honorable and who's not.

James Christy has provided the actors with an involving, thought-provoking and funny script. Christy is especially good at getting his characters to interact with each other. Whether they're debating about the appropriateness of rape as a subject for an art exhibit or bantering about the sales of cheap beer, there's a fascinating friction in their dialogue. The playwright is less effective in creating the virtual reality world of Manny's program or best friend Will's art show and as the story becomes more and more cynical and surreal, the characters lose their earlier and more affecting ways. The play is not helped by the production values. J. Wiese's set, a basic office backdrop that looks like cardboard and a series of televisions to the side, distract rather than illuminate.

The above are minor weaknesses when considering *Never Tell's* overall strengths. As a rule a play this cynical is easier to admire than to like, but given the excellent performances and the smart and well-constructed script that leaves you with lots of ideas for discussion, this one is easy to like.

NEVER TELL

Playwright: James Christy
Directed by Drew DeCorleto

Cast: Michael Blum (Hal), Lori Garrabrant (Reporter), Teresa L. Goding (Anne), Eva Kaminsky (Liz), John Rengstorff (Charkle), Jason Schuchman (Manny), Mark Setlock (Hoover), Matthew Wilkas (Will)

Set Design: J. Wiese

Costume Design: Rebecca Lustig

Lighting Design: Dusty Ray

Sound Design: Jason Rea

Original Music: Drew Sarich

Running time: 2 hours, includes one intermission Broken Watch Theatre Company at The Michael Weller Theatre, 311 W. 43rd St., Suite 602

www.brokenwatch.org

From 7/22/06 to 8/13/06; opening 7/27/06

P Weds to Sat @ 8pm, Sun @ 7pm; Mon @ 8pm

Tickets: \$20

Reviewed Julia Furay based on July 24th press performance

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