

[Review- ShapeShifter \(Howling Moon Cab Company\)](#)

March 15th, 2008

Reviewed by *David Stallings*

There is no such thing as a perfect play. Any good play has its problem areas that a talented director knows how to turn into a beautiful moment. Things are left unsaid—or are repeated—or at times seem messy. Look at *Measure for Measure*, *Hamlet*, *The Three Sisters*, or *Hedda Gabler* to understand how rough—imperfect scripts are actually fine masterpieces. Any play that is so finely focused, tuned, and wrapped up that there are no rough edges, does not lend itself to being performed more than once. Don't we as theatergoers get excited as to how a production will handle the messiness of a good play? That being said, I feel that Jonathan Wallace's *ShapeShifter* is a good play—and would look forward to seeing other productions in the future. The story is wonderfully human and expressed with much poetry so that reminded me of a modern retelling of *The Seagull*. Wallace bravely allowed his play to be rough and cracked, without ever letting it feel like it came out of the machine of typical playwriting structure.



V. Orion Delwaterman & Shelly Virginia
photo credit: Ellis Gaskell

The plot follows three siblings: Liam, Aidan, and Dierdre through a decade of evolution. All three are goofy, bright, and well educated with promising futures ahead of them. All three are also enamored or in love with the same woman, Darcy. As malleable as the siblings are, Darcy cannot change with the tides, but breaks apart as weathered stone. The play opens on a beach in front of the home in Montauk where Dierdre plans on living and working with her new lesbian lover, Victoria. Victoria has an angry streak in her and would gladly beat up anyone who rubs her the wrong way. Dierdre has begun to quell that fire within and Victoria realizes that love is changing her. This play covers ten years in three acts. Each act represents a moment when the characters must either grow or change, but status quo cannot be an option. *ShapeShifter* is about those special moments when we must transform our shape or be swept away.

Shelley Virginia heads the cast as the demure and mousy Dierdre who proves to be the most resilient character in the play. Ms. Virginia captivates the audience from the moment when you first enter the space and witness her bobbing to music—to the curtain, when she struggles over a decade of losses and compromises. Ms. Virginia never missed a moment in the play and filled her character with every human emotion. Likewise, V. Orion Delwaterman as the sweet and nerdy Aidan delivered a delightful performance filled with pathos. Shane Jerome Colt seemed to be caught up in the negatives of the eldest brother, Liam—a troublesome role. Liam is often called names and is berated by his siblings, and Mr. Colt seemed to play the role as seen through the other character's eyes rather than for his own merit.

Jennifer Boehm shined as the vibrant Darcy—a struggling actress who searches for fulfillment in Liam—a man who only disappoints her. The role was so similar to Nina from *The Seagull*; that at times I wondered if the parallels were

purposeful. Boehm truly shined in the second act, when her illusions are shattered and she grabs onto the affections of Aidan to sustain her. Boehm's journey is commendable and based in honesty. Yvonne Roen delivers an equally balanced performance as Victoria and found a fierceness that held the play together and pushed it at the same time.

Glory Sims Bowen directed the play with an attentive eye for emotion and detail. At times, the detailed awareness of the period (the 80's) seemed to distract from the honesty of the moment. It was most evident in the first act—the second act quickly alleviated that feeling. Playing at the nostalgia of youth is a difficult hurdle trapped with sentimentality and an over-all pushed feeling. The over-detailing was also the primary drawback in the dialogue—which got so caught up in early computer cyberspace terminology that the audience is left with their head spinning. When the author and director allowed the play to simply sit with its well-conceived characters and rhythms, the play soared. The poetry and theatricality of the piece would have fit better in a larger space—but who doesn't want that? The play seemed suited for an Off-Broadway run and would definitely grow best in that kind of venue.



Shelly Virginia & Yvonne Roen
photo credit: *Ellis Gaskell*

Stephanie Tucci's well-ordered set seemed like a revelation in the second act when it appeared to be the visual personification of the major metaphor in the play. The play talks about two types of people: "dolphins" and "stones". The dolphin-like blue set—walls to floor—is highlighted by a seemingly stone floor that cracks and breaks apart during the act changes. Ian Marshall handled the fight choreography magnificently—a difficult feat in such a small space. Ryan Metzler's lights and David B. Thompson's costumes added to the sophistication of the evening.

Seeing *ShapeShifter* was an affirmation of what a good play's elements should hold, and I look forward to seeing it picked up and developed further.

Howling Moon Cab Company presents

Jonathan Wallace's

ShapeShifter

March 9-29th, 2008

Monday, March 10th @7pm

Fridays & Saturdays @8pm

Sundays @ 3pm & 7pm

Tickets: \$ 18.00; www.smartix.com

The Studio Theatre at The Barrow Group

312 West 36th St. 3rd Floor (between 8th and 9th Avenues)

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