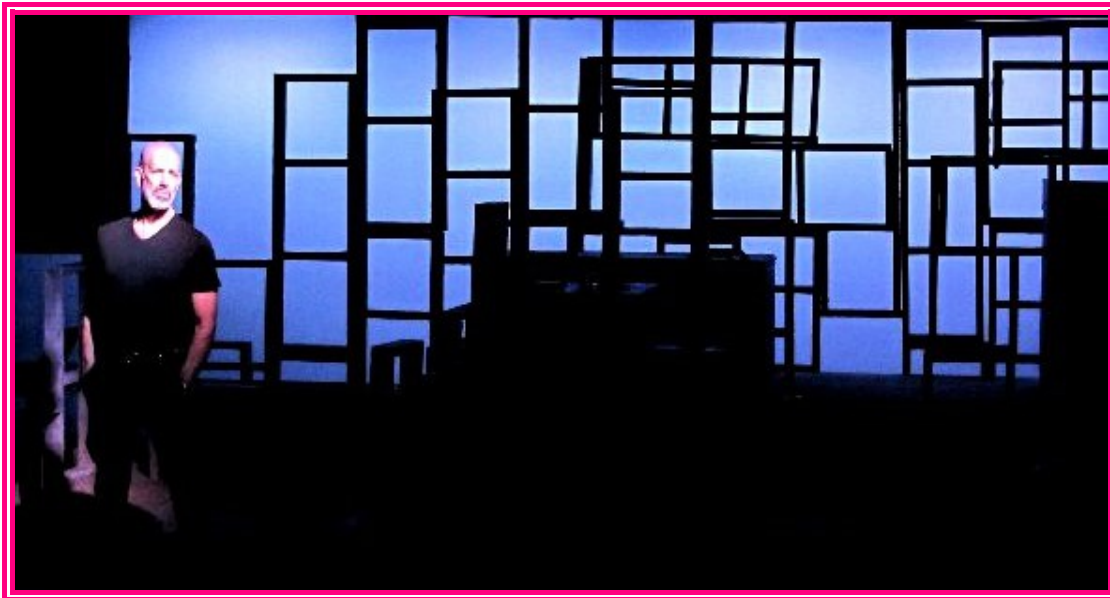


Bridge Street Theatre, Catskill, NY

*Shelley's Shadow*, by Brad Fraser. Directed by John Sowle. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

*“Have a good day”*

Bridge Street Theatre in Catskill, New York has opened a world premiere production of a play they commissioned from Canadian playwright, Brad Fraser and it turns out to be something of an homage to American playwright Tennessee Williams. In its format, the play emulates “The Glass Menagerie.” It’s hero/narrator, is a misfit writer named David. It tells from this character’s unique perspective the story of an older, obsessive woman whose home mirrors his own - they live in the same apartment building - and whose dog-child becomes his principal object of love.



Steven Patterson; Photo: John Sowle

On a wonderful set designed by director John Sowle, the story plays out in five basic locations, including her living room, his office, a hallway, a street and other locales. He becomes, in spite of himself, her official dog-walker, and he is soon the dog’s principal “Alpha” human. Named Shadow, he allows David to hear his voice, an interesting parallel to the other Tom’s crippled sister, Laura, who also puts her trust in her Tom. Shadow confides his fears about Shelley and how much he longs to be with David, an aging, 60ish, homosexual pursuing major changes in his own singular life. Shelley, in her mid-80s, is beginning to show gradual signs of dementia. David wanders into this situation and against his better judgement becomes inextricably enmeshed in this impending tragedy.



Steven Patterson, Daniel Hall Kuhn , Janet Keller;  
Photo: John Sowle

The writing is wonderful: both humorous and tragic at turns. David's narrative moments pay off in the scenes and the scenes themselves in this 98 minute one-act play are short and carry punch-lines more reminiscent of Neil Simon than of Williams. That is partly because Janet Keller, who plays Shelley, is absolutely convincing in her role. Shelley is smart, concise and willing to share her life with a stranger/neighbor who, against his will, becomes her principal care-giver. Her emotional and mental decline plays out very gradually and is sad because this character has many interesting stories to tell, many of which disappear before they can be realized. Keller is so natural in her interpretation that it is often impossible to tell whose memory has slipped - hers or Shelley's.

As David Steven Patterson undertakes an equally difficult role. He not only tells the story through his narration, he plays the man who cannot talk about himself, though he is writing a memoir. When his close friendship with Shadow grows, David becomes his real self and he ultimately brings Shadow's owner into the emerging picture of his own life. Patterson, in the closest approximation of Tom "Tennessee" Williams I have ever seen an actor attempt, manages to be a sympathetic character who works against that image of himself. This version of Tom had difficulty with almost everyone in his own life. He is too smart for his own good. He is unafraid of the unusual situation with Shadow and yet in order to make it work, he mentally creates a new person in his Shadow. The loss of the dog hurt me in the audience as much as it did David in the play.

Wonder of wonders, Daniel Hall Kuhn gives so much personality to Shadow, Shelley's Shadow and David's Shadow, that the dog stands out as a viable, almost Shakespearean character. His limited dialogue is very resonant. His physical presentation of the dog is the best I've ever seen. His pain is real, his love and admiration are real. His understanding of Shelley's mental acuity is

also very honest and real. The play, seemingly David's, is Shadow's play and when the dog's play is disturbed by the honesty of his situation, the play almost dies. Instead the focus shifts to Shelley and her story hold things together, a beautiful feature of Brad Fraser's ability to tell a story.



Janet Keller, Steven Patterson;  
Photo: John Sowle

Michelle Rogers simple costumes perfectly mirror all three characters. Whoever designed Kuhn's makeup did a fabulous job. The honesty in the play's title is both quirky and direct. The play centers on Shelley's Shadow, first on the well-named dog, and later on what is left of the woman herself, just a shadow of her former self. This is one of those plays that will stay with me for a very long time. It deserves to be seen in this excellent production. So, see it. See it now!

+ 09/09/2022 +

**Shelley's Shadow** plays at Bridge Street Theatre, 44 Bridge Street, Catskill, NY through September 18 only. For information and tickets contact [www.bridgest.org](http://www.bridgest.org) or call 518-943-3894.

