

Great Barrington Public Theater, Great Barrington, MA  
**The Stones** by Kit Brookman. Directed by Michelle Joyner,  
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

**“But you don’t think about these things at the time, do you.”**

Take Henry James’ story, “*The Turn of the Screw*” and alter the governess into a gay male teacher who has lost his job and loosened his ties with his lover, reintroduce him to a high school friend who inspired him and offer him a job as tutor to two young children in a spooky, glamorous house in Sussex on a dead lake and what do you have. . .”*The Stones*” by Kit Brookman which has just opened Great Barrington Public Theater’s 2023 season. A gothic mono-drama performed here by Ryan Winkles with the aid of Alexander Sovronsky and Wendy Welch, the play has been transformed by director Michelle Joyner into a 90 minute celebration of theatrical imagination and endurance. Time doesn’t fly by but you find yourself holding onto yourself every minute of the time you spend with Nick on his journey.



Alexander Sovronsky, Wendy Welch, Ryan Winkles; Photo: GBPT/Kat Humes.

This is a dark show, beautifully designed by Matthew Adelson (lights), Dai Ban (sets), and George Veale (costumes). Winkles is a star in a star-making role. But Jacob Fisch, the sound and projection designer rules the event along with Alexander Sovronsky whose original music, vocal echoes and sound effects, along with Wendy Welch’s spooky assistance, give the show its gloomy undertones of horror. Gothic horror is a classic form. Here it is brought out of its traditional ancient setting into today’s emotional ethos, its tragic personal history of disguising one’s true nature until it’s too late to make thing right. Nick, who narrates his own story, may be a ghost; we’ll never know. However, he does see and understand his shortcomings. Winkles’ voice wavers at the right moments, his way of addressing the mysterious stones that appear and haunt him, his angular movements as he wanders through his own personal story provide us with the people who populate his world as well as with the man inside the man whose voice we hear so clearly. His Nick is a commonplace wonder, an

ordinary person engulfed in the magic of a world he cannot honestly inhabit.



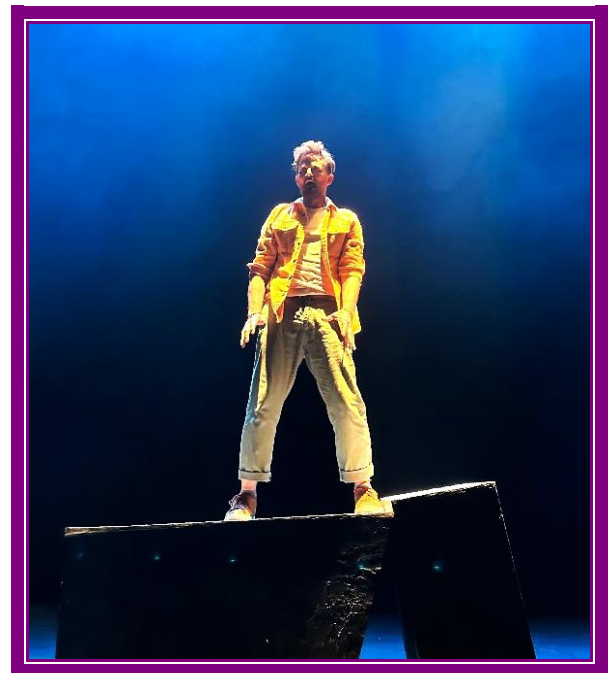
Ryan Winkles; Photo:GBPT/Kat Humes.

It is the rare vision of director Michelle Joyner that holds it all together. She allows the shadowy story to do what it must - to frighten and enlighten Nick and us at the same time. As he learns to understand his world and accept it, so do we. Joyner has created Nick's world, his music and his relationship with his adjutant performers who, in military fashion, push and pull him through the various situations he relates.

This is a spook show like no other you will see. It engages your imagination even more than it does Nick's. The mystery of the stones is never solved; what they are, what they mean, what they symbolize is unimportant; what they do is terrorize and that's all we ever know about them. Even so, this play that deals with them is so much more than just immovable items that threaten the reluctant hero. This play holds your heart in its typewritten hands and hands you over to your own imagination. It's terr-iffic-ible-ifying. A new word to ponder.

+ 06/16/2023 +

**The Stones** produced by Great Barrington Public Theater plays at the Liebowitz Black Box Theater, Daniel Arts Center, Bard College at Simon's Rock, 84 Alford Road, Great Barrington, MA through July 2. For information and tickets call 413-372-1980 or go to [GreatBarringtonPublicTheater.org](http://GreatBarringtonPublicTheater.org).



Ryan Winkles; Photo: GBPT/Kat Humes.