

Shakespeare & Co., Lenox, MA

A Body of Water by Lee Blessing. Directed by James Warwick.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“I seek the release of oblivion”

Lee Blessing’s play “A Body of Water” is not about water; nor is it about any sort of a body. It is a mystery without a murder, a relationship without communication, a family with no center. It is a unique experience without parallel. It is fascinating. A man and a woman (Kevin O’Rourke and Bella Merlin) wake up together in a strange bed in a strange room, each regarding the other as a stranger. They have had a strange experience that neither can recall. It’s all a vague non-memory, but the coffee is good though they can’t recall who made it. As they struggle through all this they realize that not only do they not know each other, they don’t recognize themselves. And why are they surrounded by this beautiful body of water. There are answers to come, but are they answers or merely more questions.



Kevin O’Rourke, Bella Merlin; Photo: Ken Yotsukura.

Confusion rules the day even after the voice of reason comes to call in the person of Wren, a young woman, played by Caroline Calkins, who could be many different people from his mistress to their daughter. Or both. Or neither. Or. . . well, this play is a mystery and each person in it, including each of us in the audience, must make up his or her own mind on these things.

Author Blessing leads us all, characters and passive observers, on a merry dance until we are dizzy with wonder, lost and unable to be found. We develop new associations with those who sit near us, never speaking to them, or touching them, though knowing they are there brings a certain level of comfort and reassurance with this knowledge. And Blessing’s mind’s eye, exemplified by director James Warwick, allows us to indulge our own imaginations as the three characters in search of the truth continuously cavort, confront, confuse and conflict facts and personal complications.



Caroline Calkins; Photo: Ken Yotsukura

Calkins' appearance instantly alters the play's tempo, its theme and its thrust. Her character struggles with nothing but the honesty she finds missing in the adults. She wants them to face the realities and truths she sees they are missing. She seems unable to realize what their confusion means. But is this real? Is this too a fiction waiting to be undiscovered? We, the no longer passive we, ache to take a side, any side, in the rich conference of sides that complicate this play but Blessing won't let us for, as in any good mystery, new facts reveal old facts and. . . but wait. . . are these actual facts or mere suppositions?

The trio of players behave as though they've never met before which delivers credence to the concept of the play. Warwick has given his actors permission to remain strangers up even the warmest of moments. Is it possible he rehearsed each one of them alone and then ultimately brought them together for the play itself? It often felt as though this was possible.

Still, things hung together brilliantly. Merlin and O'Rourke should do more on stage together. Their playing has chemistry that gives them natural heat and allows human sparks to fly. Her subtlety is so well matched by his brazen anger. Playing together they give life to a singular identity. People say that two can become one; in this case two at least are one.

Patrick Brennan's most interesting set provides a room of elegance and grandeur. Jaysen Engel's costumes are very appropriate. The play is well served.



Kevin O'Rourke, Bella Merlin; Photo: Ken Yotsukura

The play is the thing here. The play needs to be experienced. Leave all expectations in your

car. Here everything is submerged in a body of water.

+ 06/24/2024 +

A Body of Water plays in the Roman Garden Theatre at Shakespeare & Co. 70 Kemble Street, Lenox, MA through July 21. For information and tickets go go www.Shakespeare.org.