

Dorset Theatre Festival, Dorset, VT

True Art, by Jessica Provenz. Directed by Michelle Joyner.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“Your work is lovely in bed.”

Jodi Dean, like so many intelligent, successful women, has reached a point in her career where, having been passed over many times for that major promotion, frustration requires certain perquisites. Her shot has come with the acquisition of a newly discovered masterpiece by artist Michelangelo. The Metropolitan Museum of Art takes the bait in this world premiere production of Jessica Provenz’s new play “True Art,” now on stage at the Dorset Theatre Festival in Dorset, Vermont. The world is thrilled by the opportunity to see Michelangelo’s *Leda and the Swan*, all except Jodi’s new temp. Lauren Sanders, who suspects its authenticity.



Jayne Atkinson, Bob Ari; Photo: T. Charles Erickson

This witty, entertaining play is not quite perfect yet, but it keeps you laughing, keeps you intrigued and keeps you satisfied with the experience. Directed by Michelle Joyner, it maintains its tensions and keeps up the suspense until the final moments of the play. The play’s four characters are well defined and equally well played by a very good cast led by Jayne Atkinson as Jodi. Atkinson gives the stern, exacting Jodi Dean a human warmth that allows us to sympathize with her dilemma, a fact that Provenz gives a weird reality to in the ultimate scene of the play, It leaves us guessing.



Jayne Atkinson, Fiona Robberson;
Photo: T. Chazrles Erickson

Lauren is played by Fiona Robberson who understands just how to make the girl an enthusiastic, over-eager career-minded amateur into a younger version of her boss. Lauren balks at the prospect, but is clearly headed down the same awkward road as Jodi. It is her personal revelation about truth and art that makes this play such a fine examination of the art world.

As her youthful swain, J.J. Winchester, Charlie Reid is asked to show the many sides of his character which he does with ease and comfort. J.J. morphs from insolence to sincerity with wonderful and stylish acting that leaves us gasping in expectation of where he might go next.

His older counterpart and Jodi's wooer, Buddy Silver, is played by the uniquely talented Bob Ari who tackles this important role perfectly. He is charming, a bit smarmy, attractive and just a bit repulsive, a quartet of probabilities that run rampant through his performance. His love scene with Atkinson is both touching and funny, a not easy combination to play.

With all this talent on stage it is still Atkinson who rules. Her character grows and changes in so many subtle ways that we only notice her attitude shifts through the ways in which she addresses Lauren and the way in which she moves her body and hands as one discovery after another threaten the security of Jodi's future. Atkinson and company deliver every one of the author's intentinos.

A terrific set has been created by Christopher and Justin Swader with the aid of Joey Moro's eloquent projections. Lighting Designer Patricia M. Nichols has given the play its due and the costumes by Barbara A. Bell seem perfect for all four characters. Jane Shaw's excellent sound design work enhances the play throughout.



Fiona Robberson, Charlie Reid;
Photo: T. Charles Erickson



Jayne Atkinson; Photo: T. Charles Erickson

Joyner's well-paced production keeps the show in tempo and never lets us stop to think too much. We are as swept along as are Jodi, Lauren and the others. This play should have a long life after this initial production. A few tweaks in the script will help. Provenz's talent for natural humor along with her excellent plotting of a not-unusual story, should attract many more productions. Right now, it is not outside our community. It is worth a trip to southern Vermont to be among the first to experience the true artistry of True Art.

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True Art plays at Dorset Theatre Festival, 104 Cheney Rd . Dorset, VT through September 7. For information and tickets go to dtf@dorsettheatrefestival.org, or call (802) 867-2223.