

## **THE PILLOWMAN**

By Martin McDonagh

Source Theatre

Sept. 21-29 & Oct. 4-13

Ticket Info: 757-423-4084

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

The 2007-08 theatre season is up and stepping high with three excellent productions running on different Hampton Roads Stages. I highly recommend that you try to see each of them. I'm speaking of DOUBT being presented by Virginia Stage Company, THE K OF D at Christopher Newport University produced by The Virginia Premiere Theatre and this excellent rendition of THE PILLOWMAN.

It's not an easy task to describe playwright Martin McDonagh's brand of theatre. All three of the above plays have elements of dark comedy along with their serious themes. PILLOWMAN, however, is the darker and darkest of the three by any sanguinary standard one might come up with. We're talking various kinds of torture, mutilation, crucifixion, barbed wire, fire, you name it McDonagh feels life, like story telling, is a puzzle without a solution and that there are no happy endings. He weaves complex thoughts and gory acts into a gripping, very entertaining, deeply emotional theatre experience.

A writer, Katurian Katurian by name, has written over one hundred stories but only one has been published. His parents primed his career by torturing his brother in an adjacent always locked room. Art is born from suffering they seemed to feel. The brother is left permanently retarded and damaged by the abuse. The action of the play takes place in a totalitarian dictatorship where Katurian is being interrogated by two detectives. It seems some of the bloody acts in his stories have become reality with children being the victims. Does fictive violence like we see on TV or in the movies generate copy cats who make story telling real life? The stories are read in part and acted out at times in marionette mimes, as if we are seeing inside Katurian's mind.

Melissa Blue has directed the seven talented actors who make up the cast with clarity and efficiency. For me, a harder edge approach would put the sinister, frightening aspects of the action in sharper focus. Top performing honors go to Russ Staggs as the laid back but vicious detective Tupolski. He has remarkable restraint. Logan Bennet, as the writer Katurian, is a young man with a great deal of promise as an actor. His performance has depth and emotional richness. He needs to learn that shouting isn't the only way to deal with highly dramatic moments. His retarded bother, Michael, is totally convincing and believable as brought to life by Brian Wrestler. Jonathan Ward, as detective Ariel, is like a snake who attacks and recoils. He lets us see beyond the obvious

aspects of the man. Elyse Jolley as mother and Dale Payne as father handle the mime style most effectively as does Kathie Clapp as a mute child with a Jesus Complex.

Don't take the children with you to see this show but also don't be put off by it's violent aspects. Ultimately everything comes together in a kind of peaceful resolution.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.