

The Burlington Free Press

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A must see:
Catalyst's 'Closer'

Actors rise to challenging script

By Brent Hallenbeck
Free Press Staff Writer
'Closer,' as presented Thursday by the Catalyst Theatre Company, is a brutal, uncomfortable play that's too beautiful to take your eyes or ears off.

The play by Patrick Marber, made into a critically acclaimed 2004 film starring Julia Roberts, Jude Law, Natalie Portman and Clive Owen, produces even more power on the stage, as the immensely talented Catalyst crew demonstrated on opening night at Waterfront Theatre. Geneva MacPhail, Todd Townsend, Victoria Townsend and Jordan Gullikson turn a 2-hour, 40-minute play into a production you wish could go on just a little longer.

'Closer' is the perfect title for the play because it deals with the nature of humans to be close to each other and to sabotage those relationships by closing each other out. In this case it's Alice the stripper (played by Victoria Townsend), Dan the obituary writer (Todd Townsend), Anna the photographer (MacPhail) and Larry the dermatologist (Gullikson) who glide in and out of each others' lives in present-day London bearing romance and revenge. Marber's harsh but gorgeously worded script is built upon extreme sexual tension, but it requires the actors to supply equal amounts of tension to make it crackle. All four actors rise to the challenge.

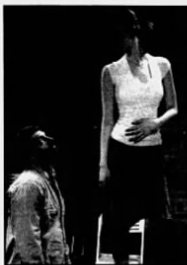
The tension starts as soon as the Townsends (no relation) open the play, and it never flags. It's no surprise Gullikson and MacPhail demonstrate chemistry; the sparks flew between them last year in Burlington playwright Stephen Goldberg's work 'Flying On the Bright Wings of Despair.' Gullikson is dynamic, showing himself to be in control at all times as the all-controlling physician. MacPhail exerts an understatement that builds to a loud-and-clear body of impressive work by the end of the night.

Gullikson and MacPhail are terrific. The real finds, however, are Victoria and Todd Townsend. She is a St. Michael's College theater major whose arena performances have been primarily on campus while he is a newcomer to local theater. Both prove themselves to be actors with bright futures. Victoria Townsend is electric, demonstrating great range in her portrayal of the winsome yet wild Alice, who can be confidently seductive and naively vulnerable, often at the same time while displaying what Larry refers to as 'the morose beauty of youth.' Todd Townsend falls short of the truly emotional tone when Dan becomes angry or distraught, but when his character veers into effortlessly charming or massively indelicate — Dan's most pronounced traits — he nails it.

It helps, of course, when actors have great lines to deliver. 'Closer' is a relationship autopsy that leaves the innards out for all to see, and Marber gives the cast a gift basket of epigrams for love.

'Anna, I cannot live without you.'

'You can, You do.'



Jordan Gullikson and Victoria Townsend appear in Catalyst Theatre Company's production of 'Closer.'

If you go
WHAT: Patrick Marber's 'Closer,' by the Catalyst Theatre Company.
WHEN: 7:30 tonight and Oct. 26-27: 4 p.m. Sunday show with dinner at the Sidney Pincus; midnight showing Oct. 26, 3 p.m. matinee Oct. 27.
WHERE: Waterfront Theatre, Burlington.
TICKETS: \$15 general admission, \$10 students and seniors.
INFORMATION: 862-2287, www.closer-burlington.com

'Please don't hate me.'
'It's easier than loving you.'
'Have you seen a human heart? It looks like a fist wrapped in blood.'
That language gives 'Closer' its strange beauty among a vast wasteland of romance. 'Closer' is also unflinchingly cynical, excessively vulgar and talky to a fault, but director Tony Tambasco keeps the pace flowing so that it never drags (though the set changes involving various pieces of furniture could move more quickly).
Tambasco cleverly uses a screen with slides as a backdrop in the place of a full set, which has the literal and figurative effect of adding more dimension to the flesh-and-blood characters on stage. The slides range from a doctor's office to a photo exhibition to the most memorable moment of the night, a filthy Internet sex-chat-room scene that's alliterative except for the clicking of the keyboards.
With all that frank, explicit talk of sex, 'Closer' is certainly not for the faint of heart. It does hit you right in the heart, though — just like a fist wrapped in blood.
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Poet Ted Scheu (center) of Middlebury appears with several H.O. Wheeler students who participated in his new book, 'I Ticked My Teachers' this week in Burlington.

No shy guy

Poet shares love of words with children

By Sally Pollak
Free Press Staff Writer

On Wednesday, his 10th birthday, Abdi Sharif enjoyed a piece of cake in the library at H.O. Wheeler School.

It wasn't his birthday cake, but it was celebratory.
Abdi and other students were celebrating the publication of a kids' poetry book, 'I Ticked My Teachers,' by Middlebury poet Ted Scheu (rhymes with guy).

Photographs of Abdi are in the book. His sister, fifth-grader Safia, is on the cover. The book is illustrated with close-up photographs of children's faces. The subjects are students at Wheeler and C.P. Smith elementary schools in Burlington.

Abdi said it made him happy to be in the book. He thought the poems Scheu read at a Wednesday assembly were cool. And he's excited to get three copies of the book. It's his first poetry book. 'That's great,' he said.

Scheu writes kid-friendly poems accessible to young people in content and style. They're about dogs and report cards; hectic mornings and motor-mouth kids.

At the Wheeler assembly, he read poems from his new book, acting them out as he recited them. The kids let out a collective 'Oooh' when he read one about a girl named Nancy kissing him on his walk to school. He was in second grade.

Scheu told the students five important things about poems:
A poem doesn't have to be long; He recited a two-word poem that a boy in Texas taught him. The title of the poem is, 'How to eat an ice-cream cone in August.' The poem reads: Lick quick.

Poems help people see things differently; It's almost like getting a new set of eyes.
Poems are very good for sharing

About the book

For more information or to order 'I Ticked My Teachers' (Cold Tree Press, 2007, \$12.95), visit www.poetryguy.com. Ted Scheu also has written 'I Froze My Mother and Other Seriously Funny Family Poems,' 'If Kids Ruled the School: More Kids' Favorite Funny School Poems,' and 'Rolling in the Aches: A Collection of Laugh-Out-Loud Poems.'

See POET, 2C



Safia Sharif (left) and Hans Thach (right) are both of Burlington, look through poems and drawings before joining fellow H.O. Wheeler students who participated in Ted Scheu's poetry book on Wednesday.

Spooky
The best of what's happening around town
Free Press Staff Report

HOWLING GOOD CAUSE
The second annual Halloween Howl SK Fun Run and Hula Hoop, a benefit for the Ronald McDonald House Charities, take place this morning at Ethan Allen Park.

A SPIRITED EVENT
Goblins, ghosts and ghouls will prance the park tonight. Take a frightful Halloween stroll past the Ethan Allen Tower.

Spirits of the Tower
Spirits of the Tower Halloween Celebration at Ethan Allen Park

off North Avenue in Burlington. Listen to spooky stories, and enjoy the glowing pumpkins along the way. If you arrive, enjoy the lighted playground in the park after your adventure. Children receive free goody bags; snacks are available for purchase. Bring your carved pumpkin for the pumpkin carving contest.

TWISTED TALES
The Haunted Forest is in its 27th year, and this year's theme is spooky Vermont stories written by Vermont author Joe Citro, who has published several books on weird Vermont folklore and ghost stories.

Freshly carved pumpkins ready for the Haunted Forest.

Citro wrote 11 vignettes for the Haunted Forest, based on Vermont history, but he took dramatic liberties, adding new twists to the local folklore. Citro said many people will recognize some of the stories, like Emily's Bridge in Stowe, but his take on what happened to the teen that disappeared from the bridge in the 1800s will leave audiences thinking.

For more Halloween-related events, visit www.burlingtonfreepress.com and type in Halloween in the search window.

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