

arts

Room with a Phew!

CHECK INTO A NARRAGANSETT MOTEL FOR CUTTING-EDGE THEATER

THEATER REVIEW

'TAPE'

E By Stephen Belber; directed by Rich Morra
Through May 4

Theater of Thought

At the Lighthouse Inn, 307 Great Island Road, Narragansett

Performances Fri.-Sun., 8 p.m.

Tickets \$25

www.theaterofthought.com

BY DAVE CHRISTNER

Amber Kelly scores big again with Theater of Thought's (TOT) second production and first "site specific" show. Producer Kelly and Director Rich Morra use a real, working motel room as the setting for this stunning production of Stephen Belber's enigmatic and hilarious psycho-babble drama, "Tape." Belber set his story in a seedy motel room and that's exactly where TOT's creative team performs it — in the cramped space of a single room at Galilee's Lighthouse Inn. (I should perhaps point out that the room was intentionally made seedy for the play.)

To experience the play first you check in at the inn's front desk and are given a room number and directions. Of course, the directions lead you back to the parking lot, but this adds a degree of authenticity to the evening. Once you do locate the room, you can either sit inside the disheveled room with the actors or outside in the indoor courtyard and watch the action as a voyeur, looking from the outside in through plate glass windows. Either way, you will experience this dazzling production with an intimacy and immediacy often strived for but seldom achieved in live theater.

The play begins with California drug dealer/volunteer firefighter Vince (Tyler Fischer) sleeping in his underwear among a stack of dirty linen. He's waiting for his high school chum, John

(Michael A. LoCicero) to show up. When he awakens, Vince gets up, stretches, scratches and goes to the lavatory to relieve himself. Fisher, who performs one of the zaniest displays of physical comedy on record anywhere, combines the finer qualities of Owen Wilson and Ed Harris in his portrayal of a down but not out perpetual loser with an axe to grind, or, more to the point, a tape to make.

John is the picture of uptight respectability. He has a degree in film from USC and his first feature is getting a screening at a film festival in Lansing, Mich., where the play is set. Vince, ostensibly, is there to support his pal, and to look up Amy (Kelly), the girl they both dated in high school 10 years earlier. LoCicero's portrayal of the self-righteous moralist John is a fine counterpoint to Fischer's edgy Vince. His natural goodwill, however, is haunted by an unforgettable and maybe unforgivable lapse in his personal behavior: LoCicero does a beautiful job balancing the moral aspects of his current life with a past that's at the very least regrettable and possibly even felonious.

These old pals reminisce about good times before John gets on a moral bent about Vince's current "job" and his recent breakup with a woman because of his "violent tendencies." Vince will have none of this and steers the conversation to an incident that happened in high school. When Amy broke up with Vince (without their ever having had sex), she started dating John. The incident in question involves the circumstances under which Amy and John did have sex; it's been eating away at Vince and is the only reason he's stayed in touch. Fischer and LoCicero deliver Berber's razor-sharp dialogue like a couple of seasoned pros, never missing a beat or a well-aimed barb.

Vince coerces the "truth" out of John, then reveals that he has taped John's "confession." Not only that, he intends to give it to Amy, who, unbeknownst to John lives in Lansing and is coming by for dinner within the hour.

This leads to a knockdown drag out in which John cowers behind the bed for protection as Vince pummels him with anything he can get his hands on. Amy's arrival saves the day and whatever is left of John's dignity, which isn't much. She is the assistant DA in Lansing, a fact that doesn't set at all well with potential felons Vince and John. But it is more her simple presence than her occupation that turns the room into a pressure cooker; the awkward silence and inconsequential small talk just makes you want to run away and hide. Kelly's depiction of Amy is as touching

as it is filled with tension; she too was deceived by Vince. She had no idea John was in town, much less scheduled to join them for dinner.

With Amy's arrival, this little keg of dynamite of a play is set to go off in an explosive climax. But I don't dare spoil the fun. See for yourself just how good live theater can be. You will not be disappointed!

By Dave Christner is a South County playwright and critic. His plays have been produced in the U.S., Canada, Australia, Japan, Germany and Belgium.