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## Stage Review: Moral dysfunction reigns in creepy 'Glory'

Wednesday, February 09, 2005

By Christopher Rawson, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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Patrick Jordan's barebones productions -- the lower case illustrates the name -- has staged just three full productions in its three-year existence, but they do seem to link up to demonstrate a bare-bones mode. I don't mean just a mode of production, which is, as the name suggests, to achieve maximum impact with few technical resources, but a bare-bones kind of play.

The current offering is Rebecca Gilman's cool and creepy "The Glory of Living." It shares with barebones' previous "bash: latterday plays" by Neil Labute (2003), and "This Is Our Youth" by Kenneth Lonergan (2004), a fascination with antsy youthful



Mara Rago  
**Patrick Jordan plays Clint, a 30ish ex-con and thief, and Amanda Frost plays Lisa, his teenage lover, in "The Glory of Living."**

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### "The Glory of Living"

■ **Where:** barebones productions at Terminal Buildings, 31 Terminal Way,

subcultures.

These cultural pockets aren't hidden; they're right out in the open: Gilman's disengaged Southern teenagers, Lonergan's alienated urban middle class, Labute's angry Mormons. But they share an appalling moral dysfunction -- perhaps transitional with Lonergan, but deeply structural (class, region, religion) with Gilman and Labute.

"Alienated" is the easy word for all these hapless young, but that expresses a judgment from outside, while they don't themselves seem specifically aware of their alienation. In their own, self-referential pockets, they feel pretty much at home, which is why they all seem so creepy.

To these plays, barebones brings an unaffected acting style which is appealing in itself but also appalls, intensifying our sense of that unacknowledged dysfunction and anger.

This is certainly the case with "The Glory of Living," which has all the gruesome grit of a tale of sex and violence extracted from the tabloids. Clint, a persuasive 30ish ex-con and thief, meets and sweet-talks Lisa, 15, while Lisa's CB-hooker mom is servicing Clint's trucker acquaintance. Jump-cut ahead, and Clint and Lisa have kids and are embarked on a peripatetic career of robbery, sexual molestation and worse.

Jump-cut is the word, because Gilman's sparely episodic script keeps spinning relentlessly and unpredictably forward, mainly from one scruffy motel room to another, leaving us to piece together the story. Doing so is an active pleasure, especially because it's impossible to anticipate what twists the story will take, so I'm not going to say much about where it goes.

South Side.

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That pell-mell structure is involving, but the play is also disquieting, not just because hapless Lisa and the other abused young people are so sad, but because Gilman's play has the studied cool of a case study. A detective and a court-appointed lawyer supply some moral framework, but mainly, that's up to us. (In this, Gilman's play is more like other barebones plays than like her own "Spinning into Butter," staged in 2001 at the Public Theater.)

The two central performances are compelling. Artistic director Patrick Jordan plays Clint as a handsome charmer who can turn violent on a dime. Ultimately, his evil is inexplicable, partly because the play isn't as interested in him as we expect. Amanda Frost, a freshman at Point Park, is a completely persuasive Lisa -- heart-breakingly blank, an innocent who does awful things without apparent affect. But in her case, we can begin to understand the poverty of her emotional background, thanks partly to Gilman's delicate "Rosebud"-like ending.

Eight more actors play 13 supporting roles, including the several young girls who get caught up in Clint's web and the law officers who finally intervene. Claire Fraley plays Lisa's frightening mom, Michael Cunningham plays a bewildered boyfriend and Terry Parshall is a burly-surlly presence. Jarrod DiGiorgi gives sympathetic substance to the lawyer.

That the play moves so briskly (90 minutes without intermission) is to the credit of director Melanie Dreyer, who admirably maintains the play's impassive surface. Having also directed barebones' Lonergan play, she clearly has a sensitivity to these dramas of thwarted youth.

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