

“Lives of Quiet Desperation”: 3-Hole Punch, 3 One-Act Plays by James Sheldon

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“Have you ever wanted to do something completely different with your life? Move to a different country? Or write a book?” says Franklin, a fifty-something financier to his much younger trophy wife. “I used to keep a diary all through High School; maybe I can find it, it’s in a box somewhere....”

“This is my shot....the time has come for me to take a calculated risk with my life...” says another character as he attempts to start a new business raising organic beef cattle.

Touching on themes that are near to many from the Baby-Boomer generation who are entertaining the last grasp at re-visiting their dreams, James Sheldon is himself an investment banker turned playwright.

In *3-Hole Punch*, a set of short one-act plays, being presented at the Copake Theatre in the Copake Grange Hall, he explores the disillusionments of adult life and the extremes that people are driven to as they strive to cope with their lives.

Although Sheldon explained, in an interview with the Millbrook Independent, that his characters are not based on people he has known, he admits that there are some biographical elements in the plays. “They are the people I might have become had I made different choices.” Unfulfilling relationships, lost dreams, sibling inheritance struggles set to the wistful strains of piano bar music, Mr. Sheldon’s ideas are indeed thought-provoking and intriguing.

A resident of Gallatin, whose office is in Millbrook, the playwright also authors “Little Town Views”, a website that presents issues of local concern such as the Carvel development in Pine Plains. He has also been able to galvanize some seriously talented theatre folk who live in the region and have all worked professionally. Director Thomas Gruenewald, who worked with Joseph Papp at the New York Shakespeare Festival, has definitely succeeded in pulling together all these very contemporary stories.

One of the most fascinating characters, and the hardest to figure out, is the black elevator-hop, Royce, played by Bard graduate Paul Carter of Hudson who has a long string of TV and theatre credits. We can’t tell if he is an angel of mercy or a harbinger of death. He sympathizes with an accountant turned songwriter in an obscure hotel “in a mid-sized city” and yet spells out the words, “a rope ends it” as he hands the man the key to opening the window in his 14th story room that could solve all his problems. He had handed the same key to the previous inhabitant of the room, a would-be beauty queen, who chose to end it out the window.

Yes, indeed, as Thoreau stated, “the mass of men lead quiet lives of desperation and to the grave will go with the song still in them.” Depressing stuff? Yes. Or perhaps, just a hard and realistic look at the human condition.

Hey Royce, where’s the key?