



REVIEW

THEATER

## “Slow Thunder” reviewed

 Terry Morgan



Sometimes great actors can save a bad play. The sheer strength of their talent or the brilliance of their star power dazzles us into not noticing or caring that the vehicle they’re in is lacking an engine or wheels. (Al Pacino comes to mind. *Hoo-ah!*) More often than not, however, a poor script leaves otherwise strong actors stuck like T-rexes in a tar pit, flailing about to no avail with their tiny arms. This is the unfortunate situation with the current **bAFA TheatreWorks** production of Suse Sternkopf’s *Slow Thunder* at the **Theatre 68 Arts Complex**, which strands some of L.A.’s best actors in a play that emphasizes the slow and fails to display the thunder.

Jewel (Ann Noble) is reading a book in her backyard in rural Illinois when she’s surprised by an unexpected visitor. Peter (Robert Yacko) has just driven a thousand miles on his motorcycle to find her, once he belatedly realized she’d left New York months ago and hadn’t noticed. The two had been in a romantic relationship when she discovered him with another woman, and when he didn’t respond to her attempts to contact him, she left town and went back to her childhood home. She’s not alone here, Peter quickly discovers – she lives with Rob (Rob Nagle) and has a good friend in Roberta (Sue Gisser). Peter wants Jewel back, but the question is, what does Jewel want?



Yacko does what he can with the role of Peter, but as written the character is neither credible nor compelling, which makes it an uphill battle. Gisser brings welcome energy and humor to her performance as Roberta, although her character as written seems unconvincing in her



abrupt mood changes. Noble makes the most of Jewel’s gnomic responses and silences, doing a lot with a little, but her explosive emotional release at the end of the story (the symbolic “storm” after the thunder) is resolved so quickly that its impact is less than it might be. Nagle delivers a solid performance and gets the best scene in the play, in which he affectingly delivers a monologue about a past relationship.

As a director, Sternkopf doubles down on the abundance of exposition in the script by staging it languorously – the only real visual or physical changes in the nearly two hours of the characters sitting and talking occur when someone changes seats. The “show, don’t tell” maxim concerning writing isn’t followed here, and the main dramatic event of the story has happened before the play starts, situations which combine to make the story less intriguing and more static. The dialogue sounds written and not realistic, and the character of Peter is ultimately so wishy-washy that one wonders why he gets the most stage time.

Ultimately, despite the puzzling presence of award-winning actors in its cast, I can’t recommend *Slow Thunder*.



*Slow Thunder* is presented by **bAfa TheatreWorks** at **Theatre 68 Arts Complex** and plays through November 12, 2023. [Tickets are available here](#).