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Past Reviews

Regional Reviews: Cleveland & Akron

Down by Contact

Playwrights Local / Dobama Theatre

Review by Mark Horning

After the cheering throngs have departed, the newsmen no longer camp outside your door, and the endorsement offers stop coming in, what does a battered 11-season quarterback do to pass the time? This is the question posed by Les Hunter's captivating drama *Down by Contact* being presented by Playwrights Local and Dobama Theatre at the Tudor House of Gilmour Academy.

Carson's (John Busser) life is in a precarious state. He lives in a mansion with his wife Kelsey (Margi Zitelli). His son Tommy (Liam Stilson) is a performing artist/musician who only comes for a visit when in need of money for his next project. Carson spends his days shifting papers around his desk and taking a variety of prescription pain medications with long drafts of vodka (not recommended).



Margi Zitelli, John Busser and Corin B. Self

Photo by Dale Heinen

Due to his booze- and drug-altered mental state, combined with all of the concussion-inducing hits he took as a quarterback, Carson holds lengthy discussions with his old friend Trypp (Corin B. Self)—who died in a car crash during Carson's senior year of college. Even in his muddled frame of mind (he imagines that people are milling about on his front lawn), Carson realizes that he is in deep trouble. In order to get himself out from under his mounting debts, he has bet the mansion on a football game for which the opposing team's trainer has given him a tip concerning the injuries of the players. What could possibly go wrong? On top of this he has been offered a large sum of money by the league to vote against a compensation clause that if passed would greatly help his former colleagues.

While the Tudor House is a bit of a drive for both East and West Siders in Cleveland compared to the more centrally located 156th and Waterloo Rd. Playwrights Local location, it is well worth the extra miles. The stage area in the historic mansion works well as the backdrop by drawing you into the action.

John Busser as Carson begins his act while the audience is still filing in, as he flits to and fro stopping to shuffle papers on his desk, peering out of the heavily curtained windows, and pouring himself another drink with which to take his pain pills. All the while a boom box plays the Ohio State fight song on a continuous loop. From his various body twitches to his shaking hands to his general mumbling, bumbling demeanor, he is the man. Margi Zitelli is perfect as the clueless trophy wife who, while bothered that the money has dried up, is more concerned about Carson's well being. Liam Stilson is also well cast as the ne'er-do-well son who has cast himself adrift into the sea of humanity but is still not too proud to come calling when his boat springs a leak. Corin B. Self is great as Trypp, the affable ghost who brings some sense of connection to Carson's past.

What happens when the roar of the crowd fades away and the effects of countless injuries begin to physically and mentally manifest themselves in our sports heroes? Playwrights Local's production gives you a realistic look into

ter the gridiron.

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Playwrights Local and Dobama Theatre's *Down by Contact*, September 2, 2018, in the Tudor House of Gilmour Academy, 34001 Cedar Road, Gates Mills OH. Tickets may be purchased online at www.playwrightslocal.org.

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