

Review: *Battered* lights a path through the darkness



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***Battered* — starring Susan Glover and Shawn Campbell — is thoughtful and humane, despite its inflammatory subject matter.** BRIAN MOREL

There's boldness in the premise of Arthur Holden's latest play, **Battered**, which is being produced by Infinithéâtre after receiving a staged reading, complete with a volatile talk-back session, a couple of years back. It's a jaunty comedy about a domestic abuse incident in which a man inadvertently breaks his girlfriend's arm, then refuses to obey a court order to stay away from her. Bristling yet?

As it turns out, Holden's play is a thoughtful, humane and often very funny exploration of the psychological and physical damage we do to one another. Most of its theorizing about the rooted savagery of the species is articulated by Eleanor (Susan Glover), the psychiatrist whom self-defined doofus Bobby (Brett Watson) is ordered to see after injuring his café-owning girlfriend, Philo (Gitanjali Jain), during a row about kittens. But despite the streams of verbose therapy-speak, **Battered** never feels preachy. Indeed, Eleanor isn't above using her own intelligence and articulacy as a weapon, and her fondness for "bad boys" like Bobby is a slap in the face for her sensitive partner, Frederick (Shawn Campbell).

Meanwhile, Philo is a gutsy fighter herself, hyper-aware of when men are clumsily muscling into her territory even at their most well-meaning.

Holden marshals his characters like a jazz quartet, whether they're bouncing dialogue off one another or alternating solos. Indeed, the use of actual jazz, slinkily played between and sometimes over scenes, adds to the sense that we're in vintage Woody Allen territory. The performances, directed by Diana Fajrajsl and presented at close quarters in a studio setting, are pin-sharp and engaging.

While one or two coincidences along the way stretch credibility, a more serious charge might be that the play's focus on an ambiguous act of violence distracts from the bigger, darker story of unqualified domestic abuse. It's certainly provocative, even troubling. But under the entertaining jokiness and zinging one-liners, there's a genuine, tough-minded engagement with the issues.

AT A GLANCE

Battered continues to Nov. 6 at the Rialto Infinite Studio, 5711 Parc Ave. Tickets cost \$25, \$20 for students and seniors. Call 514-987-1774, Local 104, or visit infinitheatre.com.