

THEATER REVIEW

Riverside offers food for thought with ‘Walking the Wire’ monologues

Food-themed program has strongest pieces during second act

By Rob Cline, Freelance writer

IOWA CITY — There wasn't too much to sink one's teeth into through the first course of "Walking the Wire: Monologues at Riverside — Food!" However, on Thursday the near-capacity opening night crowd at Riverside Theatre was treated to some truly tasty morsels after intermission.

Under the direction of Ron Clark, this year's edition of the annual show features six pieces by Iowans and six submissions from around the country. On the whole, it seemed to be the quality of those pieces — rather than the quality of the performances — that tended to fall a bit short.

This was particularly true of the first six monologues. Lorin Ditzler was perfectly winsome in Dale Mackey's "Throwing Out is Hard to Do," but the comic kernel of the script — abandoning leftovers is as difficult as ditching a disappointing boyfriend — barely held up for the few moments Ditzler was on stage.

Angela Dezen attacked Neeley Gossett's "Worth in Numbers" with a passion that brought home the ways in which young women can come to obsess about food and weight, but the monologue's numeric gimmick ultimately detracted from the message.

And Cory Johnson was nothing short of excellent in Rebecca Christian's "The Grumpy Gourmand," but the material was a bit overworked and hence fairly uneven.

Two pieces into the second act, however, everything fell into place.

John Watkins was simply brilliant in Jen Silverman's beautiful and nuanced "American Food." Watkins portrayed a man who has left a post-Katrina New Orleans and finds himself in Japan on Thanksgiving. The moving tale of friendship and loss was easily the finest of the evening, a credit to both the actor and the author.

The show's other disaster-related monologue, Shirley King's "Sandbags and Sandwiches," was not nearly as successful, despite an emotional performance by Sarah Hinzman.

Other strong moments in the show's second half included William Czerwionka's winning performance as a pizza delivery driver in Brian Tanner's "Special Delivery" and Janet Story Schlapkohl's turn as both author and performer of "Sacrificial Turkey." Czerwionka was very funny indeed as his character recounted some exotic adventures from his pizza rounds. The material is humorous, but Czerwionka deserves credit for seasoning it with excellent comic timing and the perfect pizza dude demeanor.

For her part, Schlapkohl wasn't the most natural performer of the night, but as she got into her tale of trying — and failing — to earn respect as the maker a large holiday meal, she garnered a healthy helping of laughter from the audience.

"Sacrificial Turkey" is quite well written, and although Schlapkohl's delivery seemed a bit flat in the early going, she soon had the whole room rooting for her as events in her kitchen swirled evermore out of control.

Her effort left the audience with a good taste in its mouth at the end of the evening.

"Walking the Wire: Monologues at Riverside — Food!" continues at tonight at 7:30 and Sunday at 2 p.m. at Riverside Theatre, 213 N. Gilbert St., Iowa City. Tickets are \$12 to \$24 at (319) 338-7672 or [www. riversidetheatre.org](http://www.riversidetheatre.org)