



Theater review: 'Lone Star,' 'Laundry' revivals open with triumph

New concept works for acclaimed plays

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By LAWSON TAITTE / The Dallas Morning News

Sometimes when you mess around with a good thing it gets even better.

Contemporary Theatre of Dallas's 2004 production of James McLure's double bill *Lone Star* and *Laundry and Bourbon* earned some of the best reviews and most enthusiastic audiences in recent Dallas theatrical history. Contemporary's idea behind reviving it this year was to reproduce it virtually intact – but in the event, director Cynthia Hestand had to replace four of the six cast members and set designer Randel Wright came up with a whole new concept.

With all the potential for disappointing the fans, it seemed a bad omen that one of the performers came down ill before Friday's opening. The proceedings thus started with *Lone Star*, which usually comes second. Apparently it was a narrow thing whether *Laundry and Bourbon* would get onstage at all on Friday. But in the grand theatrical tradition, the show did go on, albeit in reverse order. And the whole evening was a triumph for all concerned.

All three men in *Lone Star* were new. Vietnam vet Roy (Ashley Wood) is out back of his favorite beer joint, drinking with his slow-witted brother Ray (Joey Oglesby). The hell-raising Roy picked on the nerdy Cletis (David Plunkett) in high school, and he's picking on him still.

In *Laundry and Bourbon*, Roy's wife Elizabeth (Diane Worman) prowls around her back yard, hoping that her husband's pink Thunderbird will come over the hill. Instead, her friend Hattie (Sue Loncar) drops in, seeking any excuse to get away from her unruly children. Their confidential conversation gets interrupted when Cletis' social-climbing wife Amy Lee (Marisa Diotalevi) comes by to spread a little nasty gossip.

Contemporary's *Laundry and Bourbon* has grown considerably since 2004. Ms. Diotalevi and especially Ms. Loncar, the returning cast members, deepen and sharpen their excellent work from before. Ms. Worman is a revelation – earthy, wry and wrenching, all in very personal and singular ways.

Mr. Wood has to compete with the memory of Mark Nutter's inspired Roy from two years ago. His take on the role has darker shadings, but – thank goodness – it's equally brave in its physical and emotional abandon. Mr. Plunkett far outshines his predecessor, and Mr. Oglesby gives perhaps the subtlest and most detailed performance in the whole show.

Perhaps the reversal of the two one-acts' usual order fortuitously reveals that this time around the women's play is the funnier of the two and builds to a bigger climax. Or maybe they build on each other any way you shake them up – as long as the production sizzles like this one.

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Through Sept. 3 at Contemporary Theatre of Dallas, 5601 Sears St. Runs 150 mins. \$24, discounts. 214-828-0094, www.contemporarytheatreofdallas.com.

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