

## **‘Powerful’ performances, ‘smart, funny’ writing revealed in Public Theatre’s ‘Secret Hour’**

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Is your highest ethical duty to yourself or to others? That’s the provocative motif of “Secret Hour,” the current production at The Public Theatre in Lewiston.

The play is smart, funny and sometimes gut-wrenching as a married couple work their way through some daunting “secrets” to find answers to the question of their highest ethical duty.

Kate, played by veteran stage actor Katharine McLeod, is an ethics professor at a university. Ben, played by actor and playwright Jason Cadieux, is an engineer with a tedious and unfulfilling job at Best Buy. We learn that he has been fired from his job as a security systems engineer.

Kate, also a writer, has taken a teaching job to pay the bills. She finds that she loves teaching. She’s on track for tenure and doesn’t want to leave her job and start a new tenure track somewhere else.

Ben wants to move to California to work again as a software engineer. And, he wants a family. They’ve been trying for two years without a pregnancy.

The play gets its title from a game the couple has invented. During Secret Hour, they reveal frivolous things to each other, such using a strand of hair as dental floss and finding three-legged dogs creepy.

According to the game, they agree to continue loving each other regardless of how embarrassing or shameful the secrets are.

But when a bombshell secret and some longtime lies are revealed, the couple must make decisions about their marriage and confront how to find their best selves within the compromises required of a relationship.

With the help of a handyman named Leaf (who has secrets of his own), played by Brooklyn-based actor Josh Adams, they come to terms with their conflicts.

Adams gives an endearing performance as the wise — and wisecracking — handyman and “life coach” hired to fix a bathroom leak but still hanging around four months later. Adams, in denim overalls and a Hawaiian shirt, provides comic relief with perfect timing and low-key deliverance, getting belly laughs from the audience.

McLeod makes Kate a powerful presence. Her expressions and body language morphing from brainy, dynamic lecturer in the classroom to devoted (eventually self-appraising, angry and defiant) spouse. Her lectures on Nietzsche and Confucius, who embody the ethical crux of the play — duty to self or duty to others — are animated and accessible.

Cadieux brings a quiet strength to the character of Ben, displaying a broad range of emotion (anger, sadness, despair) and plenty of wry humor.

The play was written by Jenny Stafford, an award-winning book writer, lyricist and playwright whose work has been produced on Broadway. It is the play’s second production after its world premiere last year in New York.

Chris Clavelli, resident director of The Florida Repertory Theatre, directs the play.



*Josh Adams as Leaf, Katharine McLeod as Kate, and Jason Cadieux as Ben in a scene from “Secret Hour”*