

Metamorphosis
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Theater Review: *Lolita Roadtrip* is gold liquid

No question: playwright Trevor Allen has a gift

by Clinton Stark

Lolita Roadtrip



Directed by Lee Sankowich

Starring Chloë Bronzan, Patrick Alparone, Julian López-Morillas, Stacy Ross

By Trevor Allen

On the Web: thestage.org

The Tweet of it:

Like any road trip worth its flat tire, there's at least 1 gun, 1 twist. How you react I cannot say. Gold liquid? Eternal beauty?

By any measure this was another one of those rockin' cross-country road trips. There is the souped-up muscle car, a hitch-hiking free-spirit, and a soul-searching grad student; and the journey takes our starry-eyed dreamers across small town America including stops in towns in Virginia, Tennessee, Texas. A bottle of tequila in Las Vegas — the epicenter for self-discovery — along with some pirates, clowns and hookers (*oh, my!*) leads to epiphanies, or maybe, at least, the idea that if we travel south far enough we may survive long enough to understand why we're chasing ghosts.



CHLOË BRONZAN as JULIA points out the constellation to PATRICK ALPARONE as DANNY in Trevor Allen's LOLITA ROADTRIP

But that is the superficial. Lepidopterists take note.

You see, in Trevor Allen's clever *Lolita Roadtrip* which enjoyed a huge world premiere this weekend at The Stage, butterflies are not built to last- almost like a theater production: it takes years to bring to the stage, and then is gone in a matter of weeks. I'm not normally one for advice, but if you must understand the reason for live theater, head to The Stage and watch this show closely. In a world of nanosecond pop-culture, aka "the meme generation," it brings great relief that intelligent, thought-provoking art like this is bursting to life on stage.

Metamorphosis is key to survival — albeit temporarily.

Perhaps this roadtrip, based on Vladimir Nabokov's 1941 journey from New York to California, might accompany a beautiful symphony, enshrouded in layers of sultry harmonies and mesmerizing rhythms. It is a thinking person's journey.

No question: Allen has a gift.

You get the sense after witnessing opening night that this is the tip of the iceberg in this talented playwright's arsenal. I'm guessing that each and every person that left the theater in San Jose on this Saturday evening walked away with a different message, a different reaction. It's a personal experience. Billed as "darkly comedic," I got more of the dark than the laughs, although there were several of the latter.

The story concerns analytical Stanford grad Julia (Chloë Bronzan) who succumbs to the charms of Danny (Patrick Alparone), a free spirit she runs into at a local NY Public Library. Then they retrace the steps of Nabokov's actual 1941 roadtrip, from New York to Stanford in Palo Alto. His 1955 novel "Lolita" itself becomes a key character. A professor (Julian López-Morillas) tells us one version of the story, urging us to consider its implications. Meanwhile his wife (Stacy Ross) fights cancer.

To recap: a Russian novelists' real-life roadtrip is interweaved with his allegedly fictional novel "Lolita" which in turn is given a contemporary cross-country re-imaging (with messy spare ribs to boot!), along with the *Cyliópsis Pertepída Dorotheá*. That this material can be so well-crafted, so beautifully layered is in itself impressive.

Unfortunately, the acting on this evening was not quite up to task. Those botched lines can be contagious, but no matter, this is a talented lot, all four actors are equity, and I expect the opening night hiccups to absolve themselves rapidly. I hope, too, that the chemistry between Bronzan and Alparone, the two leads, gels just a bit more... I think smoldering at times is in order.

The set (Giulio Cesare Perrone) is yet another feat. How does Randall King and co. do it? Again and again, this is the theater that simply amazes. A large rotating platform gives us several perspectives, rotating dramatically. One moment it's a bedroom bathed

in a dramatic spot and gorgeous lighting (Maurice Vercoutere), the next stomping grounds for a UFO convention in Lubbock.

And that sound design (Cliff Caruthers)? It's modern, melancholic tone sits just right with this viewer.

Like any road trip worth its flat tire, there is at least one gun, and one twist. It's the journey that matters, however, not the destination. How you react to it I cannot say. Gold liquid? Mind-bending narrative? Eternal beauty?

Lolita Roadtrip

By Trevor Allen

The Stage, San Jose

3.5 out of 5 stars

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Starring Chloë Bronzan, Patrick Alparone, Julian López-Morillas, Stacy Ross

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Photos by Dave Lepori