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SHOW OF THE WEEK



LABUTE FORCE Lowe and Cox go Deep.

In a Forest, Dark and Deep

"You pushed a button," Bobby (Darrell W. Cox) tells his sister, Betty (Natasha Lowe), by way of explaining his hostile over-reaction to a mild provocation. Playwright Neil LaBute spends most of this 2011 two-hander, receiving its U.S. premiere at Profiles, pushing buttons of his own. Despite strong enough performances from Lowe and Cox and competent direction by Joe Jahraus, it's tough to shake the sense that LaBute's play is cynically manipulative.

Betty, a college educator with a promiscuous past, has asked younger brother Bobby to come out one dark and stormy night to help



Profiles Theatre (see Resident companies). By Neil LaBute. Dir. Joe Jahraus. With Darrell W. Cox, Natasha Lowe. 1hr 45mins; no intermission.

her clear out the cabin she and her husband own as a rental property. The tenant, Betty says, has flown the coop, and she wants to get the place cleaned up for showing. Bobby, who's holding onto a lifetime's worth of sibling resentment, immediately senses that Betty's story is full of holes—as do we. Betty's stuttering disclosures of the extent of her lies

alternate with tedious screaming matches for the next 90 minutes.

The dichotomies LaBute sets up between the pair—Bobby as the coarse, vulgar but apparently moral blue-collar guy, versus Betty's educated amorality—telegraph which side the playwright's on. He gives Betty a couple of long speeches about love and loss, buoyed here by Lowe's convincing delivery, that would seem like plays to reverse his misogynist reputation—if they weren't undercut by both Bobby and LaBute shaming her alleged sluttiness and ultimately casting her as a ruiner of men's lives. —*Kris Vire*

Hairspray



Drury Lane Oakbrook Terrace (see Resident companies). Book by Mark O'Donnell and Thomas Meehan. Music by Marc Shaiman. Lyrics by Scott Wittman and Shaiman. Dir. Tammy Mader. With ensemble cast. 2hrs 25mins; one intermission.

The colors are bright, the dancing is sharp and the hair is big in 1962 Baltimore, where spunky, chubby teen Tracy Turnblad (Lillian Castillo) sparks a movement for racial integration and overall self-acceptance on after-school TV. Since its debut a decade ago, the musical adaptation of the 1988 John Waters film has become a contemporary classic. The bold characters, relentlessly catchy music and inspirational story line make *Hairspray* a musical antidepressant.



BALTIMORE OR LESS Castillo says good morning.

Tammy Mader's production is a steady stream of feel-good energy.

Mader, who directs and choreographs, has a fine handle on

spectacle, but at times she puts too much onstage. During "Mama, I'm a Big Girl Now," for instance, the ensemble appears to dance behind the mother-daughter pairs, pulling focus from the number's real stars. Conversely, placing "Run and Tell That" on a bus enhances the cultural significance for the black characters, but restricts the choreography during one of the show's most exhilarating songs.

The female characters dominate this production. Castillo gives a pitch-perfect performance in the central role, while Rebecca Pink is equally excellent as her best friend, Penny; the duo's comic skills match their powerful vocals. As the show's big mamas, Felicia P. Fields and a cross-dressing Michael Aaron Lindner prove that talent, at least, doesn't discriminate. —*Oliver Sava*

Girl You Know It's True



Pavement Group (see Fringe & storefront). By Bixby Elliot. Dir. David Perez. With ensemble cast. 1hr 35mins; no intermission.

The line between fibbing and fraud turns out to be a thin one in New York author Bixby Elliot's new play, in which a playwright named Bixby (John Zinn) is faced with a frustrating lack of interest in his work. Sick of rejection letters, he submits his latest work under an assumed identity: Sid Heywood, a black, paraplegic lesbian. Bixby's flight of fancy becomes a victim of its own success when a major theater takes the bait; digging himself deeper, Bixby hires an actress (Sam Bailey) to be his stand-in. This main plot plays out in contrast to another story shown in reverse: the fall and rise of Grammy-winning lip-synchers Milli Vanilli.

There's certainly something wearily navel-gazing in plays about how hard it is to do plays. But in the juxtaposition of Bixby and Sam's story line with the pop group's real-life tale, Elliot gets at a broader theme of getting caught up in the mechanics of success. As eager fakers Rob and Fab, Sentell Harper and Armand Fields winningly sell both Milli Vanilli's unfortunate tale and their music-video choreography. But Elliot's direct-address interludes with other notable "imposters," from J.T. LeRoy to Kim Kardashian, muddy the waters. With the pop duo's story, Bixby/Sid's career woes and Bixby's troubled relationship with boyfriend Paul (Keith Neagle), the threads become too many. That David Perez's use of the Chopin Theatre's basement space places much of the action seemingly miles away from the audience doesn't help. —*Kris Vire*



JEST NEW ARTISTS Harper, left, and Fields go glam.

Theater