

Bridge Street Theatre Gets “Better” with Michelle Carter’s World Premiere

[Theater](#)

By [Patrick White](#) On Sep 13, 2019

[Bridge Street Theatre](#) is taking the temperature of America right now and presenting a very funny, deeply human, startlingly original examination of how we as citizens and family members reconcile with the barbarism around and within us. The World Premiere of “Better” by **Michelle Carter** as presented by Bridge Street Theatre is a fascinating, deeply impressive theatrical discovery.



Montana Lampert Hoover, Brian Linden
Photo by John Sowle

There are shocking, horrifically violent acts that occur with numbing regularity in this country. This play takes up after one of those committed by the protagonist Emily’s (Montana Lampert Hoover) mother and is quickly followed by a less bloody transgression. Emily has run out of money and can’t continue college. Devastated that she won’t be able to continue her studies of Cellular Biology she tells her father (Brian Linden) she will get a job, take some time off and earn money to finish her degree. She also refuses a letter from her mother in jail and changes her answer to what she would do with a day to herself when her father suggests her mother would do the same.

She is a young woman on a quest to find and define herself. She ventures forth and seeks support with her boyfriend Michael (Eric Fleising), help and sustenance in the afterlife from Medium Molly (Lori Evans) and earning money from a server job at the local The Melting Pot where she is hired by Luisa (Carla Lewis).



Montana Lampert Hoover, Eric Fleising
Photo by John Sowle

The path to growth and maturity will be identifiable and relatable by everyone in the audience and Ms. Carter is one funny playwright. Her Medium is fond of cracking jokes “If a turtle loses its shell, is it naked or homeless?” But Emily’s plight is heightened and deepened by the actions of her mother and Emily’s fearful, guilt ridden and driving force to simultaneously understand and distance herself from her genetic, hereditary traits. The play is primarily done in two- character scenes. The progression and backstory of what her mother has done keep you involved and eager for each next step in Emily’s journey. Every scene has big laughs and many of the scenes ended with applause from the Preview audience Thursday night and I greatly appreciate the personal story about how we live humanely, how can we make things better with the scourge of American barbarism on the rise. There is a point when we cannot understand all though and the playwright has deferred to the mystery, the lab professor Emily is desperate to talk with is named Bannerjee, perhaps a reference to “Passage to India,” another literary work with a crime at its center and unknowable motivations?

Montana Lampert Hoover in the lead role of Emily is a star. She effortlessly commands attention in every scene she's in and is so transparently, affectingly natural and alive that when she lies in her job interview the audience immediately senses it with the first syllable out of her mouth. She's in virtually every scene and does everything well from confrontations and homemaking with her father to her table side history of fondue to a reckoning of sorts with her mother. Terrific, natural, moment to moment, incandescent radiance. A performance to love.



Montana Hoover Lampert, Lori Evans
Photo By John Sowle

Brian Linden does a very fine job navigating his new world and how others see him while learning the intricacies of couponing and grocery shopping on an inmate call. Lori Evans as the Medium in love with jokes tickles Emily at the same time thwarting her desire to contact the dead and has a climactic channeling scene that is deeply satisfying and wonderfully, simply theatrical. Eric Fleising is tender, puzzled and charming representing our deep hopes for Emily's future as her good guy boyfriend Michael. Their first trip to bed together is a shining moment. Carla Lewis is wry and comforting as she hires Emily at The Melting Pot and shares her own ambivalent life story in a touching post-shift bonding.

Artistic Director John Sowle handles the attractive and efficient set and lighting as usual at Bridge Street giving us a pattern of cells on the floor and hung before the upstage cyc which takes on different lights and projections changing settings for the many scenes. The opening scene with the help of original music by Rodney Alan Greenblat felt like a trip thru the bloodstream. The technical contributions on the climax with most of the cast attending a séance at The Melting Pot was delicious. Director Sara Lampert Hoover, mother of the lead, has done superb work with her actors, presenting this challenging new play with its humor and horror coursing thru its veins. The Pay What You Can Preview featured a talkback with the playwright speaking of her inspiration with the composer and director in the house.



Brian Linden, Montana Hoover Lampert
Photo by John Sowle

“Better” is a Eureka moment in the Capital Region theater lab, a discovery to be acknowledged and celebrated.

Thru 9/22

Tickets: www.bridgest.org

800-838-3006