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When insanity visits

■ Sarah Kane's '4:48 Psychosis' is a moving, emotional look into a troubled mind.

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Lifestyle Editor

PAWTUCKET – A lot of plays and screenplays have been written that show the effects of mental illness; "Equus" and "Fisher King" come to mind.

But Sarah Kane's "4:48 Psychosis," on stage now at the Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre, shows us mental illness itself.

THEATER REVIEW

Audiences spend an hour and 12 minutes witnessing the anguish of a clinically depressed, suicidal character, identified only as Woman. She's being treated for her illness, so there are conversations with her doctor, but most of the play consists of her internal monologues.

It makes me uncomfortable to say I "liked" watching this struggle, but it's correct. It is impossible not to be affected by what this Woman says, what she experiences and observes – and by the way The

Gamm presents the playwright's intense, personal work. The production leaves an indelible impression.

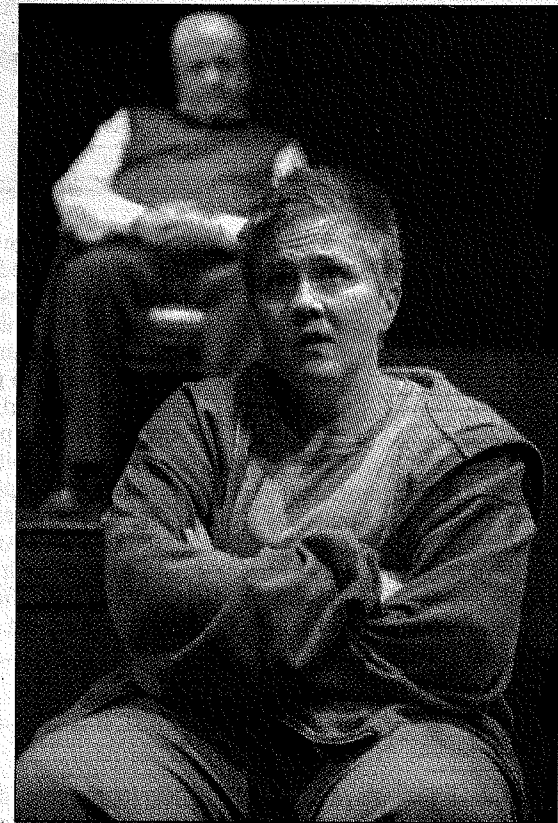
The title refers to the early morning hour when the Woman, or actually the playwright, who was clinically depressed herself, would awake to "one hour and 12 minutes in my right mind, 4:48 a.m., when sanity visits."

Even in the depths of her illness, Kane was an acute observer, one of the strengths of the play. She refers to her doctor's calm tone, for example, as "the smooth psychiatric voice of reason," but counters his efforts to explain her condition with the charge, "Your truths, your lies. Not mine." How accurate that sounds.

Her doctor tries a pharmacy full of drugs on his patient, noting without emotion their effects, side effects or lack of effect. But an angry Kane says, "Don't switch off my mind by trying to straighten me out."

There are flashes of dark humor. This Woman's guilt is so deep and wide, she claims, "I gassed the Jews," and in the same list of sins includes, "Everyone left the party because of me." Major or miniscule, the problems of the world are her doing.

No one, I think, can completely describe mental illness. We can feel despair, anguish, hurt, but those bleak emotions aren't even in the same category as



Gamm photo/Peter Goldberg

Casey Seymour Kim and Tom Gleadow appear in '4:48 Psychosis' at The Gamm.

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The Gamm

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this Woman's depression.

Kane's play, however, comes heartbreakingly close to sharing what her illness was like. Her mental struggles are so overwhelming, they make suicide seem rational, and in fact, Kane killed herself at age 28.

So, can this be a place we want to go? Can this be called art?

Yes. Theater should arouse emotions, take us places we otherwise might not go, offer experiences we otherwise might not have, and "4:48 Psychosis" does all of that.

The production, moreover, is a work of art. Gamm resident actor Casey Seymour Kim gives a fearlessly authentic portrayal as the Woman, expressing her tortured thoughts and emotions with understanding — and a host of physical quirks.

Tom Gleadow does what needs to be done as the Doctor, playing the dispassionate professional.

Director Tony Estrella, The Gamm's artistic director, deserves applause for taking the risk on producing this very different play and then shepherding the performances.

Because Kane offered no stage directions, the director has to start from scratch, even to the number of actors. Estrella's version works so well, it's hard to imagine how it could be done any other way.

Patrons will leave the theater with a range of emotions, and those interested in sorting out those feelings are encouraged to attend one of the post-show discussions with mental health professionals from Butler Hospital and Gateway Healthcare Inc., both of which are sponsoring the production.

Discussions are scheduled tonight after the 8 p.m. show, starting at about 8:15 p.m., plus Jan. 27 and Feb. 3 after the 7 p.m. show, at about 8:15 p.m. The discussions are free and open to the public, and while show attendance is encouraged, it's not required. Persons who see the show on different nights are welcome to return to sit in on the discussions.

Performances continue through Feb. 7. Tickets are \$24, \$28 and \$40 depending on day and time. Discounts are available for students, seniors and groups of 10 or more. Call (401) 723-4266 or buy tickets online at gammtheatre.org.