

Murder gets big laughs in "Deathtrap"



Charles Runnells, crunnells@news-press.com 11:01 p.m. EDT October 16, 2014



(Photo: Special to The News-Press)

The walls are covered with weapons: Sabers and daggers, pistols and axes, even a crossbow and a spiked medieval mace.

If you're a thriller lover, you'll probably rub your hands together with glee when you see all those death-dealing devices. You just know most of them are going to be used at some point in Lab Theater's "Deathtrap."

The big question is when.

And how.

That's half the fun in this funny, clever and sometimes downright scary comedy thriller written by novelist Iran Levin (best known for "Rosemary's Baby"). But it's by no means the only fun you'll find.

Director Ken Bryant and his cast keep you on your toes with some wickedly funny lines and one insane plot twist after another. Plus some deeply "meta" dialogue that constantly winks at the audience and makes self-referential commentary about the 1982 movie starring Michael Caine and pronouncements like, "You know, this could be a good idea for a thriller!"

The story involves once-hot playwright Sidney Bruhl, whose last four thrillers have been complete flops. Then he receives a crackling new play from one of his seminar students, and he schemes to lure the student to his study on a dark and stormy night, kill him with one of his many weapons and pass the play off as his own. At least, that's the idea he's toying with – much to his ailing wife's frowning disapproval.

And then... Well, you'll have to watch the play to find out what happens next. I won't spoil the many surprises along the way.

I can say this: Scott Carpenter is wicked-good fun as acidic playwright Sidney, his eyes twinkling with gleefully murderous thoughts as he milks comedic lines like this one: "What's the use in OWNING a mace if you don't use it once in awhile?"

True, his Sidney could have been meaner and darker. He's just a bit too *nice*. But you can't complain when you're laughing this hard.

The rest of the amateur cast is good but uneven. Dallas Stobb is likable and effective enough as the young student Clifford (plus he's a little scary later in the play), but I wished his character had been a bit more expressive. Angie Koch generates some effective sympathy as Sidney's fretting wife. And I especially loved Cindi Heimberg as the kooky psychic next door – although her jangly gypsy belt gets a little distracting.

I must credit director Bryant for creating some tense and unsettling scenes of violence throughout the play. They don't happen often. But when they do, they come out of nowhere and land like a punch to the gut.

The same goes for many of those plot twists. You won't see most of them coming.

And all those weapons? Don't worry, thriller fans: Many of them will get used.

You can count on it.

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If You Go

- **What:** Laboratory Theater's "Deathtrap"
- **When:** Now through Oct. 25. Performances are 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, with one matinee at 2 p.m. this Sunday
- **Where:** The Laboratory Theater of Florida, 1634 Woodford Ave., downtown Fort Myers
- **Tickets:** \$20 (\$12 for students)

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