

CITYPAGES

- One thing about the criminal-justice system: It will never have to shutter its doors for lack of business. Humanity is a bottemless fount of

transgressions, felonious behavior, and garden-variety fuck-ups that guarantee prosecutors, judges, and defenders will never find themselves twiddling their thumbs in boredom.

THE JURY

Off-Leash Area's Jennifer Ilse served on a jury in a murder trial last year, and the experience was sufficiently vivid that it led to *The Jury*, an original work that delves into the courtroom process with an eye to detail and an aching heart, with a visual poetry that sidesteps cliché and restlessly seeks the invisible intersection between guilt, culpability, and the circumstances of a life that make an evening's wrenching mistake resemble something akin to the inevitable.

The Prosecutor (Elena Giannetti) leads off the action, and interjects, throughout, the details of the event for which The Accused (Ilse) stands trial: a New Year's Eve party, one lover too many, some drugs, a gun, and, eventually, a man bleeding to death after being shot at close range. Giannetti is crisp and all-facts, focusing on prosecutorial ineluctability while Ilse squirms and scowls in her chair.

The facts of the case, in other words, aren't up for debate. The question is whether The Accused should pay for her sideways role in that fatal evening (on Paul Herwig's set, Giannetti plunges through planter boxes for notebooks of evidence, literally digging through the dirt in search of the truth). No doubt it was the wrong place, and the wrong time, but for The Accused such wrongness seems to be the main fabric from which her life is stitched.

And here is where *The Jury* flashes its delicate, shining strength. Ilse choreographs a series of two-woman movement sequences performed with Karla Grotting that draw The Accused firmly into the realm of our sympathy (albeit darkly). Grotting portrays a series of women called Her Desire, Her Teacher, and Her Mother, and these dance interludes on Off-Leash's hyper-compact stage bristle with painful insight. First Ilse visibly aches with pained desire, then descends into nihilistic-brat mode, tearing pages from a book at school. Finally she plays out an emotional sequence as the daughter of a junkie mother, a push-pull of want, repulsion, cruelty, and emptiness that probably lays out The Accused's case more effectively than reams of dialogue.

In its hour-long course onstage, *The Jury* has moments of startling empathy and cold, stark insight. By the time it's over, we're perplexed as to how we might judge The Accused, though Giannetti's Prosecutor sums things up from her end: "Innocence or guilt—that's all we do." If only we could all share her freedom from doubt.