

RABBIT HOLE

By Chad Swiatecki

Writer for The Flint Journal

Sometimes just the words themselves are enough.

That was Walter Hill's thinking when he scheduled the Pulitzer Prize-winning and Tony nominated play "Rabbit Hole" for January's presentation of Flint Youth Theatre's Off The Press Series, which takes place Sunday at the Elgood Theater.

Far from a lavish, showy production, the work of acclaimed playwright David Lindsay-Adaire is a nuanced study in human grief as a handful of central characters react to the accidental death of a small child, making it a good fit for the FYT series that features only actors reading their parts with no costumes or staging.

"There's something about the writing there that's really compelling and when I read it I could hear certain actors' voices in my head," said Hill, FYT's associate artistic director.

"Some plays are more difficult just as a reading, but with this one the key to everything is in the dialogue and there's nothing like where someone's walking through a thunderstorm that would be hard to present to the audience.

"At our last reading almost everyone said they liked just listening to the lines of the play and there's a lot to take in this one with the interactions all the characters have with each other."

As parents Becca and Howie Corbett react and struggle with the death of their young son, their lives are altered and twisted by family members and the tormented teen behind their son's death.

It's the stuff of a Lifetime movie of the week at first blush, but Hill said Lindsay-Adaire's writing adds unexpected humor and eccentricity into the drama to keep audiences guessing about what's ahead.

"The thing that sets it apart is the play is funny as hell along with being heart breaking, so the touches of humor are what I most look forward to seeing on Sunday, to see how they play with the audience," Hill said. "I wonder if they're going to laugh along with the same things I do, because you never know quite how people are going to react to those things." Also different from many full stage productions, "Rabbit Hole" doesn't wrap with a large showpiece or dramatic ending that knocks its viewers over at the end. Instead, it ends almost with a question mark with the afflicted characters still firmly uncertain about what's next for them.

"The writing is so naturalistic and slow-developing and some people who see it and then say they don't get it complain that it doesn't really end in the way they're used to," Hill said. "It makes you think afterward about where these people are going instead of wrapping everything with a big 'wow.'"

"That's what I think is so special, the way larger information is revealed in tiny, odd ways that make the characters more like people in real life. That's what this play does so well."