

# Powerful and painful

## ‘Luna Gale’ takes unflinching look at human suffering

Lansing City Pulse

By [David Winkelstern](#)

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It dealt with heartbreaking and uncomfortable issues. It had creepy characters and moments about as cheery as watching your grandfather being brutally clocked by a grandfather clock. Despite that, I enthusiastically endorse “Luna Gale.”

Peppermint Creek Theatre Co.’s production of the Rebecca Gilman play was often tortuous to sit through. Descriptions or depictions of child rape and abuse, meth addiction, our over-burdened Child Protective Services system and over-zealous evangelicals might not sound like anything you’d want to buy a ticket for. But the Peppermint Creek cast — deftly directed by Jordon Climie — made the often overwhelming show worth every bloodred cent.

Sarah Lynn, as Karlie, offered a convincing depiction of a meth user confronting the possibility of losing her child, Luna. As believable and potent as Lynn’s verbal deliveries were, her jittery and animated body movements alone were enough to sell the role of a woman on the edge. I cannot imagine anyone doing a better job in that role.

Connor Kelly, as the father, Peter, delivered a multi-faceted performance that established his own verbal and physical prowess. Kelly skillfully evolved from a despicable dad to a likeable father. Jean Burk, as Karlie’s super-Christian mother, Cindy, went from meek to weird to aggressive to horrified, with each transformation feeling authentic.

Depending on one’s religious leanings, Chad Swan-Badgero’s Pastor Jay was either a model of a wise evangelical leadership or a bat-guano-crazy lunatic — or maybe both. To me, Badgero was more than an actor playing a part; his pastor impersonation was eerily realistic.

Ben Cassidy as Cliff, the social worker’s boss, was also admirable in his portrayal of an un-admirable fellow who had hidden religious motives. I admit that I liked hating him. The role of Lourdes was capably played by Danica O’Neill, who gave a convincing performance as an alum of the public support system who was still in need of help.

Participants in the Peppermint Creek play powerfully portrayed poignant and perfect portraits of passionate people in perpetual pain. The suffering characters went through transformations during “Luna Gale” that required new levels of acting, and each actor masterfully met the challenge.

That includes Angela Dill, as Caroline, the damaged, ever serious, big-hearted social worker. I remembered Dill for comedic roles in plays like “You Can’t Take it With You,” “The Amazing Jesus,” and “Nonsense: The Mega Musical.” In those plays, Dill sometimes had me close to tears of laughter and joy. In “Luna Gale,” Dill’s moving performance had me near tears of sadness and despair. She conquered the lead role with a fragile fierceness.



The Peppermint Creek set, designed by MJC Construction, was mostly simple furniture and plain chairs. But with five spots on the stage in the Miller Performing Arts Center that were altered to create eight settings, the “basic” set actually becomes quite complex. It suited an unpredictable and gripping story that did not require fancy scenery.

Amid the turbulent language and gale force moments in “Luna Gale” were spots of tenderness and humor. The only time emotion wasn’t gushing from the stage was during the 15-minute intermission. In summary, “Luna Gale” blew me away.

“Luna Gale” Peppermint Creek

Theatre Co. 8 p.m. Thursday, June 8-Saturday, June 10; 2 p.m. Sunday, June 11 \$15/\$10 students and seniors  
Miller Performing Arts Center 6025 Curry Lane, Lansing (517) 927-3016, [peppermintcreek.org](http://peppermintcreek.org)