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Theater review.

Characters, Plot Aimless In 'Adrian'

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There's no doubt that Chicago writer/director Christopher Hickman knows his characters well in "God Bless Adrian, Michigan," a play named after a town he lived in.

The question is whether you'll want to know them.

A raunchy group-portrait of blue-collar party animals and the goodtime girls who hate their guts, the play anatomizes Adrian's dead-end inhabitants as bored, boozing, dope-snorting, sex-mad, violence-prone losers.

For this inaugural production by Still Hunt Theatre [Company](#), Michael Laphorn has created a basement rec-or wreck-room complete with heavy-metal posters and party leftovers. It's a fitting captivity for Hickman's disaffected characters.

Managing to go nowhere stupidly, the testosterone-crazed, macho-blustering boys taunt each other, harass women, brag about breaking into golf courses and beating up a keeper, and chug their brews. Finally, they turn on Martin (the author's surrogate), a [local](#) who left Adrian for Chicago to work in the suspect realm of theater.

Energizing their aimlessness is Hickman's very natural dialogue; teeming with streetwise grunge and trash talk, it captures the rapping rhythms of inebriated blowhards. At times, a weird poignance sinks in as the inmates briefly wise up to their lifelong bad trip, then grab another beer and continue the tailspin.

Those glimmerings of painful recognition, not the brawls that [pop up](#) every 20 minutes, redeem "Adrian, Michigan" from its sheer familiarity.

The problem is there aren't enough of them and too many other moments that, like the characters, go nowhere. The script also raises questions that are clumsily abandoned about who did what to who and why.

But the chief problem is Martin; smug and condescending, he shows up to point a message we got long before.

Both frantic and elegiac, Hickman's staging is strong on energy and pathos. Pungently right are Dan Harray's menacing, steroid-chomping streetfighter, Rob Nagle's manic, self-proclaimed bad boy, and Heather Brooks as a lush who mistakes sex for respect. Most moving is Meg Brogan as a mother, who, hobbled with a kid whom the delinquent dad sees as a cute toy, tries to break free from her bad luck.

"God Bless Adrian, Michigan" runs through Aug. 8 at Chicago Actors Ensemble, 941 W. Lawrence Ave., fifth floor; 312-404-4972.

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