

Frank talk on frightening subjects

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Nine years ago, Youtheatre presented the Ed Roy play *Bang Boy, Bang!* for the first time. The work, about a 17-year-old who has too much to drink at a party and rapes a girl, was an instant critical and popular hit.

It's been touring high schools in both French and English ever since.

Bang Boy, Bang! is back for one public performance this weekend, with a new actor and updated language and video clips.

Judging by a Tuesday matinee, one of a string of student performances this week, the one-man play, directed by Michel Lefebvre, can still tame the toughest of crowds.

Comments overheard in the audience as students from two alternative schools filed into the small Theatre Calixa-Lavallee indicated it was the first live-theatre experience for some and they weren't sure what to expect.

Uncertain teens in an unfamiliar setting can sometimes spell disruption, but actor Anthony Johnston won their silence with a compelling performance.

Johnston finished a Centaur Theatre run as the son in the Edward Albee play *The Goat or Who Is Sylvia?* mid-March and had one week to rehearse for the Youtheatre production. He's a quick study and a name to watch for.

The entire play unfolds in Rod's messy bedroom. Answering machine messages and abstract video footage with voice-overs fill in the story's blanks as Rod shakily extricates himself from a hung-over haze to begin grappling with the horrifying fallout from committing a violent and criminal act.

Rod has no one to turn to. His older brother demonstrates a complete contempt for women and dad fools around on mom then refuses to understand her upset.

It was a party. Rod was drunk. She was pretty. And his brother always told him, "They say no, but they really mean yes."

The language is frank and the subject is sex and sexual violence. This is not a play for youngsters. It is, however, an important play for teenagers in the throes of dealing with peer pressure and hormonal insecurity.

Johnston's performance is made that much more powerful by his avoidance of histrionics to convey terror and remorse. Instead, he physically controls his rising panic, allowing only his eyes, a faint perspiration and tension in the voice, arms and gut to betray Rod's self-loathing and escalating alarm.

The restraint works. You find yourself perched uncomfortably in your chair praying he won't explode on the spot.

Bang Boy, Bang! is not preachy, nor does it offer clear-cut resolutions to Rod's predicament. See it. Talk about it.