

Second Thought brings out a 'Snake' charmer

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ADDISON – Maxey Whitehead performs alongside six of Dallas' best actors in *Snake Eyes at the Mardi Gras Motel*. She mops up the stage with them.

Not that there's anything wrong with the other performances. Ms. Whitehead just makes Lissie, an abused and ornery 16-year-old, as worthy of respect and even love as she is exasperating.

Second Thought Theatre gave Steven Walters' drama its world premiere Thursday in WaterTower Theatre's studio space. Matthew Gray, co-founder of the lamented Classical Acting Company, directed.

Half the set shows us the dilapidated motel room where Lissie is hiding out with her former teacher, a high school football coach named Weldon (Clay Yocum). The other half is a police interview room where Mike Schraeder and John S. Davies play bad cop and good cop as they question Weldon about a crime at least 20 people saw him commit – the murder of his star quarterback.

This fifth play by Mr. Walters that Second Thought has performed lacks the obvious religious dimension of some of the others. It holds a major surprise or two, but plot isn't its strength. We guess what lies behind the mysterious murder early on. What keeps us from dismissing the key plot point with a blasé "Could have written it myself" is Ms. Whitehead's gripping narration of the background events at the show's climax.

The wary relationship that develops between Weldon and his lawyer (Allison Tolman) keeps the piece alive, and T.A. Taylor as Weldon's wastrel father and Ashley Wood as the coach's disillusioned best friend both turn in masterly performances.

Once again, though, Ms. Whitehead as the skinny, obviously underprivileged kid who keeps trying to act sexy is the main attraction. You feel sorry for her, but as Weldon himself tries so valiantly to deny, it's not just pity you feel. As Mr. Walters has written her and as Ms. Whitehead performs her, Lissie has all sorts of hidden charms.

At the end of the day, you might be willing to go to extremes for her, too.

PLAN YOUR LIFE Through April 20, pre- sented by Second Thought Theatre at WaterTower Theatre in Addison. Runs 120 mins. \$20. 972-450-6232, www.secondthoughttheatre.com.