

## **REVIEW: 'WIRE' MONOLOGUES MORE BLAND THAN SPICY**

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**By Loren Keller**

Perhaps food is just something better enjoyed than discussed at length.

And maybe that's one reason why I left opening night of Riverside Theatre's tenth annual presentation of "Walking the Wire," a series of monologues that focused this time around on the theme of food, feeling less than satisfied.

The actor Al Pacino once said that acting on stage is akin to "walking a wire" without a net. But I was reminded last night of something Pacino said in the film version of David Mamet's "Glengarry Glen Ross" in his role as salesman Ricky Roma: "Great meals fade in reflection. Everything else gains. You know why? 'Cause it's only food. This (stuff) we put in us. Keeps us going. It's only food."

That pretty accurately describes my own thoughts about food – I like eating it as much as the next guy, I do cook on occasion and I have my favorite restaurants — but I lack anything near the finely tuned tastes of a sophisticated foodie.

That could be one reason why most of last night's audience seemed to enjoy the show more than I did.

The first monologue, "Throwing Out is Hard to Do," begins with the line "I threw away my Thai chicken salad last night." Actress Lorin Ditzler goes on to rhapsodize for several minutes about how great the dish was and the anxiety it causes her to toss it out.

I've had great Thai chicken salad too, and have even enjoyed it in microwaved form out of a take-out box a couple days later. But to me that's just not a terribly interesting subject for a five-minute monologue, written by Dale Mackey of Knoxville, Tenn. It's only food.

A first act piece that felt a little more inspired was "The Grumpy Gourmand," a monologue about annoying waiters written by Rebecca Christian of Des Moines and performed with the appropriate tone of exasperation by Cory Johnson. Anyone who has dined in a restaurant is probably familiar with the irritation brought on by servers who

insist on reading the entire list of specials, yank away plates too soon or ask existential dread-provoking questions like “Is everything all right?”

The actors were better served by their material in Act 2.

Riverside newcomer William Czerwionka, a theater major at Cornell College, delivered the funniest monologue of the evening, playing a pizza delivery man (now there’s a character I can relate to) with stories about some of the stranger deliveries he’s made. With a credible Boston accent, a natural storytelling ability and great comic timing, Czerwionka details his character’s encounters a naked woman, a mysterious but generously-tipping recluse, and a pregnant woman who he must drive to the hospital. Another standout performance was delivered by Riverside regular John Watkins, who brought a poignant bit of acting to “American Food,” the best-written monologue of the series by Iowa City’s Jen Silverman. Watkins plays a displaced Hurricane Katrina refugee living in Tokyo, who longs for a Thanksgiving meal but settles for splitting Kit Kat bars with a non-English speaking Japanese friend – a taste of home that reminds him of “English spoken fast and raunchy.”

The final monologue of the evening, “Sacrificial Turkey,” was written and performed by Janet Story Schlapkohl and seemed to be the most crowd-pleasing of the night. The last line of the piece might also have best summed up the entire show: “I was at least, or maybe at best, salvageable.”