

# THEATER REVIEW: 'Entangled' captivates at Salem Theater

**Friday** Posted Sep 23, 2016 at 3:17 PM

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Potential can be thrilling. Scary thrilling, or captivatingly thrilling. With Leah A. Miles's play "Entangled," onstage now at Salem Theatre Company, audiences get a bit of both.

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

**If you go...**

**WHAT:** "Entangled," by Leah A. Miles

**WHERE:** Salem Theatre Company, Shetland Park, 35 Congress St., Salem

**WHEN:** through Oct. 1

**TICKETS:** \$15, \$20. Visit [www.salemtheatre.com](http://www.salemtheatre.com) or call 781-308-4737.

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Possibilities abound: within the play, among the players, with the staging. Not all of them get realized, which makes the achievement of "Entangled" incomplete.

Nate Bertone directs, and created the marvelous set: a rural Maine cabin, where Ian (John Manning) spent his ominous childhood, and where he returns now with his newly married wife Hillary (Caroline Keeler) to honeymoon.

The set, which sprawls throughout STC's malleable space, blends the believable with the surreal. It seems comfy and country-cabin-like, but birch trees intrude into the cabin walls. What should be outside, might also be inside — a telling notion in this interior drama. The set intimately embraces the audience, who find themselves sitting in the living room, the bedroom and near the kitchen. But it also cleverly maintains the fourth wall.

Only the opening carry-across-the-threshold scene lacks anxiety; after that, everything seems contentious, and eventually explosive. The marriage took place immediately after Ian's father's death; Hillary wants to explore Ian's feelings, coaxing him to talk through the relationship he had with his remote, uncaring father.

Ian wants none of it. He wants to talk about them, and starting a family, which draws discomfiting body language and deflecting responses from Hillary. Something's bothering her about that, and we're destined to find out.

The presence of Scott (Lee Holmes), Ian's boyhood friend, looms. Hillary has never met him; the two men had a falling out — unexplained ("it's complicated," Ian says dismissively) — and Scott has missed (supposedly) all the recent changes in Ian's life. Yet another thing Hillary wants to explore ("Call him, right now," she urges), but which Ian deflects.

Then Scott appears. First as an unseen intruder — the audience witnesses him enter the cabin, stoke the fire, then disappear. He surreptitiously returns, uninvited, scaring everyone. From there things deliberately unwind.

A troubled childhood, including the curious suicide of a third friend. Abusive and half-crazy parents. Unsettling ritualistic games. Hillary becomes unmoored as Scott and Ian's childhood gets revealed, escalating to the point of confrontation. When the climax gets reached, with Hillary handcuffed to the furniture, Scott wielding a knife and Ian holding a gun, the secrets have finally come into conflict.

"Entangled" succeeds in reaching its destination, but not entirely on the path that gets us there. The complex tale of secrets and lies needs polishing before audiences can believe that the fraught conclusion really is possible.

There are too many incomplete interactions. Ian and Hillary take far too long to admit to Scott that they are married. This gambit has enormous potential — the couple could be either unwilling to hurt Scott's feelings, or nervous about his certain violent reaction, or both. But the delay is

incompletely unexplained — for far too long.

Hillary's response to Scott needs crafting. He's a creep, but she doesn't always give him the creep treatment. She's far too calm as he eerily replays childhood games, or handles her physically (at a certain point, when Scott places his hands on her shoulders, everyone in the audience shivers, but not Hillary).

Hillary's admission that she had an abortion — and Scott's involvement in that revelation — draws an inappropriately wild response from Ian. The build-up to his reaction is hinted at, but inadequately sketched.

The overall pacing, and some lackluster delivery, need invigorating. Up until the dramatic ending, far too much dialogue gets spoken in calm, measured voices. It seems a deliberate device — masking life's darkness with everyday interactions. But it has a lulling effect on the hidden clues being dropped left and right. Variety needs to be introduced.

The trio gets well-managed by the script. The action allows duos to interact while someone is offstage: Scott and Hillary play out an unsettling marionette scene while Ian makes tea; Ian and Scott argue about their falling out while Hillary sleeps. And Bertone blocks the action cleverly, maximizing the possibilities of the unconventional set.

Apart from some improbable interactions, and some implausible plot leaps, all three players do a seamless job with Miles's dark, imaginative play. The potential leaves us wanting more.

Salem Theatre Company's "Entangled" runs through Oct. 1 in STC's home at Shetland Park in Salem. Tickets (\$15, \$20) are available at [www.salemtheatre.com](http://www.salemtheatre.com) or by calling 781-308-4737.

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Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow @PowersKeith; email to [keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com](mailto:keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com)

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