

An Intense Ride to 'Hell'

By Marcos Bernal-Salas

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Theatre plays, as well as films, that are based on literary novels are hard to accomplish. No matter how hard the writer or director tries sometimes it feels like something is missing in the overall presentation. It's an ambitious and brave task to undertake and those who do deserve nothing short than a standing ovation. In part, this is true of 'Straight to Hell', **Stephen Stahl's** stage adaptation of **Kathleen Hudson's** novel of the same name. He has taken an intense novel and transformed into a brave and mesmerizing play. The off-Broadway setting is perfect for such a powerful story that goes hand-in-hand with outstanding acting.

Hudson's novel, published last October, takes on drug addiction and its effect not only in the individual but also the family around it. Jake, a promising football player, is a young man that takes a tumble into despair and drug addiction. After watching Stahl's stage adaptation I definitely want to run to the nearest book store and read through such a devastating, maybe even personal, story that Hudson has written. The intensity of the story is definitely present in the stage. **Adam Ratcliffe** is a superb Jake; he embodies the ups and downs, and overall descend of his character with an impressive and heartfelt acting. I wish the same could be said about the rest of the cast and that's not because they lack talent, but because Stahl's words seems to be focused on Jake; and only Jake.

'Straight to Hell' is supposed to be a play that takes on 'the effects drug addiction has on a family'. But it seems to me that little attention is

given to these characters, for the most part they seem strong but are not fully developed to understand the afflictions they carry throughout because of Jake. Maybe this is where Stahl has to compromise somehow to carry an effective and commanding stage adaptation. Just under two hours the play accomplishes what is set out to be; an intense ride into despair, drug addiction and the heart wrenching effect that drugs have on people.

'*Straight to Hell*' is playing at the Abingdon Theatre 312 West 36th Street (bet 8th and 9th aves.) visit SmarTix for tickets.

Through March 25th: Tues - Fri at 8pm. Sat at 3pm & 8pm.

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