

# Rocky Mountain News

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## Evil grows in this foreboding garden

Paragon Theatre scores again with unsettling drama

**By Lisa Bornstein, Rocky Mountain News**  
**October 19, 2007**

Paragon Theatre Company knows how to set a mood.

For last season's *Hedda Gabler*, it was pristine and white, the tense facade of the 1950s.

For *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the aura was faded academia with a residue of last night's alcohol.

Walk into the Phoenix Theatre now and you'll hear piercing wind and a scratchy radio and settle on the scrap-wood shack shared by two English gardeners. Far from the image of gentleman hobbyists, Wattmore and Griffin are blue-collar laborers, but with no less pride than the professors who surrounded them at Cambridge University, where they kept the grounds.

Something went wrong, though, in Jez Butterworth's play *The Night Heron*, and now they're both jobless, scratching a life by hunting rabbits.

From the start of Butterworth's play, director Wendy Franz imbues the most mundane of moments with a sense of foreboding. Something here is wrong; it could be the cult Wattmore has taken up with, or the new boarder Griffin has brought home. She's just out of prison, named Bolla, and both solicitous and possibly unhinged.

Butterworth's earlier play, *Mojo*, was also produced by Paragon, and its fast-talking, ultraviolent protagonists earned his comparison to Martin McDonagh and Quentin Tarantino. He shows more breadth with *The Night Heron*, a quieter play and, as a result, a more unsettling one.

Paragon continues to prove itself as a theater company to watch - not in the future, but now. Franz has built a unified production with impressive acting, particularly from company founders Michael Stricker as Griffin and Warren Sherrill as Wattmore. Stricker's daffier character is funny in a blithe, Ricky Gervais manner but conceals potentially darker strands. Sherrill seems bigger than he is, a gentle, sensitive bear of a man with the struggle beaten out of him.

As Bolla, their roommate, Mare Trevathan presents a solid, rough woman, awkward in dealing with others and uncomfortable in her body. "If we become best friends," she tells her new roomies, "I'll die for you."

Somewhere in this play evil lurks, and both the characters and the audience search for its location. The answer, unpleasantly enough, may not be forthcoming.

## The Night Heron

- **Grade:** A-
- **When and where:** 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays, through Nov. 10, Phoenix Theatre, 1124 Santa Fe Drive
- **Cost:** \$17 to \$19, two-for- one Thursdays
- **Information:** 303-777-3292

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