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**[New post] H-T Review: 'Prospect Hill' ventures off campus, into intriguing performance**

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7th &amp; Jordan &lt;comment-reply@wordpress.com&gt;

Mon, Mar 27, 2017 at 11:16 PM

Reply-To: 7th &amp; Jordan &lt;comment+py86ksx55byo-rmmj7sszv@comment.wordpress.com&gt;

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New post on **7th & Jordan****H-T Review: 'Prospect Hill' ventures off campus, into intriguing performance**by [IU Theatre Department](#)

By Matthew Waterman | H-T Reviewer



From left: Joshua Robinson (Rex), Christopher J. Handley (Jacob), Josh Smith (Ethan)

It's a known fact that many Indiana University students only experience Bloomington in a bubble. When they do stray from campus, they often don't make it past downtown.

You can get a degree from IU without ever realizing that Bloomington has mansions, trailer parks, surrounding farms, gorgeous lakes and quaint little neighborhoods such as Prospect Hill.

"Prospect Hill" is the title and the setting of the latest production of the IU Department of Theatre, Drama and Contemporary Dance. This show presents an opportunity for IU students to peer into Bloomington life outside the bubble. Of course, it's also an opportunity for any area resident to catch a smart, funny and intriguing play.

For those who don't know, Prospect Hill is just west of downtown, sandwiched between Kirkwood Avenue and Second Street, stretching from around the B-Line Trail to Rose

Hill Cemetery. The houses are small, charming and colorful, with a refreshing lack of uniformity.

Bruce Walsh, currently in his third year of the MFA playwriting program at IU, is the author of this highly original and enjoyable script. Matched with Ansley Valentine's direction and a stellar cast of three (plus an offstage voice), Walsh's play is simultaneously amusing, engaging and puzzling.

The play revolves around a married couple, Jacob and Rex, living in Prospect Hill. Rex is a former pharmaceutical salesman who retired from Cook at the ripe age of 52. Jacob is a therapist, but without a formal practice. He takes a few clients in his home, where he leads them through "mindfulness" exercises.

Jacob and Rex have enough problems as it is, with Jacob's deeply religious father still unable to accept his son's homosexuality. But the main conflicts in the play arise through both men's relationships to a young man named Ethan. He originally enters their lives as one of Jacob's clients, but the relationship evolves into one that really can't be described with any single word (nor any single sentence, for that matter).

Ethan is a Pepsi truck driver, born and raised in Bloomington, where his grandfather once worked the limestone quarries. He's a recovering addict with a child on the way. Ethan has ambitions well beyond driving his truck, and he resents being seen as a hick. He seeks Rex's assistance in becoming a pharmaceutical salesman, despite having just one semester at Ivy Tech to his name.

"Prospect Hill" depicts a series of trials in Jacob and Rex's marriage. The two men, already at odds over issues such as faith and Jacob's relationship with his father, have a wedge driven between them by Ethan. Jacob can't cope when Ethan and Rex seem to find something in each other that neither could get from him. Later on, however, Ethan's presence seems to bring Jacob and Rex much closer together, before again driving them apart.

In most theater, film and television, the characters are simplified renderings of people that, in reality, would have much more nuance to them. Not so in "Prospect Hill." Walsh's characters seem just as complicated and perplexing as real people, perhaps even more so.

The actors brilliantly capture this complexity. Chris J. Handley and Joshua Robinson are an ideal pair as Jacob and Rex. Joshua M. Smith makes for an Ethan that one can't help but root for. Under Valentine's careful direction, these actors rarely strike a false note.

The compelling drama and thematic depth of "Prospect Hill" alone would be enough to sell it, but the cherry on top is the humor. More than a few moments in Friday night's opening performance had the audience laughing heartily.

"Prospect Hill" ends rather strangely, without much sense of resolution. That's sure to bother some audience members, but it is how most stories end up in real life, after all. The play shows that even in a gorgeous place such as Bloomington, each of us carries around an array of doubts, fears, hopes and unanswered questions.

## **If You Go**

**WHO:** Indiana University Department of Theatre, Drama and Contemporary Dance.

**WHAT:** “Prospect Hill” by Bruce Walsh.

**WHERE:** Wells-Metz Theater in the Norvelle Center, 275 N. Jordan Ave., Bloomington.

**WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday; 2 p.m. Saturday.

**TICKETS:** \$15-\$25. Call [812-855-1103](tel:812-855-1103) or visit [theatre.indiana.edu](http://theatre.indiana.edu).

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