

# Teens and a Ouija board - what can go wrong?: Our Dear Dead Drug Lord is a wild look at teenage life

In an intriguing mash of coming-of-age adventures and the supernatural - with a smattering of gore - *Our Dear Dead Drug Lord* proves one of the most provocative pieces on RI stages this season.

Making its premiere in the state at Burbage Theatre, the show runs an intense 80 minutes without intermission as a group of four Catholic school girls in 2008 Miami turn a history project into a quest to raise the spirit of Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar.

If there seems little comedic about the image of the girls clustered around a Ouija board, kissing a Ken doll and snorting cocaine, fear not. Playwright Alexis Scheer appeals to audiences who like to strap in for a careening ride, this time through adolescence as the girls prank each other, share stories of sexual exploration and offer glimpses into their private lives. Still sound serious? The ride is lightened by writing that is biting and funny despite the topics for a combination that truly mimics teenage life.

Co-directed by Catia and Madison Cook-Hines, this production grips the viewer from the first few moments and doesn't let go until the smoke literally clears and Escobar maybe - or maybe not - saunters off.

One girl, Kit, explains the angst that caused her to cut long scars onto her abdomen. Pipe, who hosts the meetings in her treehouse, longs to reunite with the younger sister who drowned in the family pool on her watch. Zoom worries about a pregnancy while yearning to appear older. And Squeeze misses the father who killed himself after losing his job.

Casting such a small cast is key and the directors have succeeded in assembling a quartet with rich chemistry who believably squabble, talk over each other and provide sweet support when needed. In one scene, Ari Kassabian as Zoom tries to help Squeeze, played by Marina Tejada, prepare to break up with her boyfriend. The feisty back and forth exchange is passionate and genuine.

At another moment, Sofia DaSilva, who plays the Cuban Pipe, erupts at Squeeze for comparing the school's ban of their Dead Leaders Club, which she calls freedom of speech infringement, with the dismantling of Confederate statues. They are angry with each other, but in a way friends squabble but always return to each other for comfort.

All the actresses are passionate and entertaining. Just one habit should be addressed - Ayryn Ramirez, who plays Kit, seems unable to control her smile at points when her character should be sad, mad or frightened. It proves somewhat distracting.

Scheer's writing gets wild at points. Animal - and maybe human - sacrifices? Yup. Death day? Wear your black. Escobar delivering a diatribe in Spanish? Again, strap in. But, the undercurrent of this show is friendship and survival against familiar obstacles in adolescence. That is definitely worth any dizziness caused by plot twists.

*Our Dear Dead Drug Lord* runs through June 26 at Burbage, 59 Blackstone Ave, Pawtucket. Go to [www.burbagetheatre.org](http://www.burbagetheatre.org) for details.