CRAVE
by Sarah Kane

Directed by
Greg Kowalski

Sound Design:
Dave Seidel

Cast:
Dei Xhris
Susan Pepperman
Greg Kowalski
Crave – Sgouros Theatre, New York

Writer: Sarah Kane
Director: Gregory Kowalski
Reviewer: Jonathan Alexandratos

Not everyone responds to the work of Sarah Kane, and those who do often do not respond the same way. Kane wrote five turbulent, emotional plays (and one short screenplay) before her life was tragically cut short by suicide at the age of 28. When her work does not depict intense physical violence, its verbal imagery tends to be even more brutal. Yet, there is something hyperreal in her characters’ words and actions. There is always the sense, conveyed through the poetry of Kane’s scripts, that the violence endured and created by the people onstage has a real and damaging effect on the entire world. For those who haven’t approached Kane’s writing before, it may work best to think of it as a very theatrical reading of poetry, a la Anne Carson’s wonderful creations. It blossoms where reality and poetry intersect.

That having been said, this Fringe production of Crave is an excellent addition to the range of interpretations given to this play. The temptation tends to be to present Kane literally, with all-too-real sets. (Soho Rep.’s beautiful production of Kane’s Blasted went this route.) Kowalski, perhaps by virtue of being in the Fringe (but probably also due to his general theatrical aesthetic), has gone a different direction. For the play’s hour-long run time, both he and Xhrist dance to the words of the play, which sound like they’re coming through via transistor radio, thanks to Dave Seidel’s brilliantly subtle sound design. Xhrist and Kowalski’s movements are projected onto a screen via a filter, which transposes images on their bodies and creates an ever-changing painting of the play. As characters called A, B, C, and M speak their lines depicting incest, rape, love, loss, and grief (with chilling specificity), dance represents those words to create an essentially Cubist take on theatre – one sees all angles of this story simultaneously. What is offered, then, is a riff on two classical forms: the radio play, and the painting. This is perfect for Kane’s work, which tends to show that the classical elements of our world are not exempt from the sometimes absurd brutality of love and hate. Picasso would have approved.

The work of Kowalski & Co. is worth seeing at any point in time, but it is never more relevant than now. With the tragic news of Robin WilliamsÔ suicide producing a national dialogue on depression that no one seems sure the meaning of yet, it is important audiences see Kane’s work. Crave, especially the way Kowalski has presented it (with the stage mostly dark, cave-like, only allowing glimpses of pain) is an invitation into the mind of the depressed. It allows audiences to see exactly the throes too many must endure every day. It is not the Lifetime movie. It does not blame the victim. At the end of the play, the lights come up for the actors’ final bow. The lights do not come up on the stage, however. They come up on the audience. While the actors take their curtain call in the dark, we, the audience, see that we are the show, and it is these traumas that are watching us, willing to claim us all. Crave does not present empathy; it makes its audiences more empathetic. It makes viewers realize that we must do better for each other than those who failed Sarah Kane, than those who failed her characters. It is this catharsis that is the highest form of theatre. It is this catharsis that Kowalski’s work has given audiences.

No. Not everyone responds to Sarah Kane. And those who do often do not respond the same way. So go to the Sgouros Theatre. See this production. Let it envelop you, and it will. See if it moves you. See if you find beauty in Kane’s world, or are moved to create beauty after being a guest in it. Talk about what you felt. Keep the dialogue going. It couldn’t be more urgent.

Showtimes: Sun. (8/17) @ 4:15pm, Fri. (8/22) @ 9:15pm, Sat. (8/23) @ 5:15pm