

REVIEW: 'BANK JOB' AT AMPHIBIAN

BY MARK LOWRY

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FORT WORTH — The smartest comment from one character in John Kolvenbach's botched-crime comedy *Bank Job*, having its world premiere at Amphibian Stage Productions, alludes to the fact that the best way to get away with a bank robbery is to be a bank executive. If we learned anything from the 2008 crisis, it's how the rich and powerful can pretty much do what they want.

Of course, not all of those bankers walked away without penalty, and throughout Kolvenbach's frequently funny but uneven comedy, the question of getting away with it is in the back of the mind for the audience and the five characters onstage. Will anyone walk away unscathed? Probably not, and we're all the better for it.

Taking place in an executive washroom at a bank (spot-on scenic design by Bob Lavallee), we first meet brothers Russell (Leicester Landon) and Tracey (Marshall York), who have just held up the bank in clown masks and plan to make their exit through a window. It's their first go at such a crime — or any crime, really — and we learn much about their relationship and motives in the first scene.

That's when we also meet bank teller Jill (Alexandra Lawrence), who had done a no-no by using the men's room — and the executive one at that — and was there when the robbery happened. Soon, cop Dale (William Earl Ray) and exec Francis (Michael Muller) enter the picture.

For much of the 90 intermissionless minutes, it's a who's-on-first scramble to see who's going to leave with any of the \$14 million the brothers have in their large duffel bags. But there's also a sweet love-at-first-(gun)sight subplot, themes of identity crises and a bigger story of familial dysfunction.

When Kolvenbach fires on all cylinders, *Bank Job* — which reaches farcical levels — warrants uproarious laughter. The early section in which three characters lie on the ground with their hands behind their backs is one of the

funniest scenes you'll see all year, and it's handled with rapier timing by this cast and director Jessica Bauman.

There are a few times when the dialogue feels out of place, as if it belongs in another play, such as Jill's dreaming-in-color speech.

Lawrence makes her local acting debut here, and she gives the most consistent performance as a very likeable 20-something who's clearly not happy with her life and seizes an opportunity to change it.

The casting of York and Landon as brothers is curious. It's hard to tell which one is supposed to play the straight man (or as close to it as possible) to the other's comic doofus. The latter, you'd think, would be Russell, played by Landon with lost-at-sea cluelessness and a surfer-dude vibe. Tracey had his life together — he's a doctor — but York's penchant for rubber-faced mugging calls his motivations into question. More often than not, though, the dynamic works. Is there a need for the straight man when both are misguided in their own way?

Despite some hold-ups in the writing, the play is clever in its melding of a backstage comedy (the stage outside the washroom door has an even bigger drama going on) and a story about family members who, in the end, care for one another.

Bank Job will go down as one of Amphibian's more memorable world premieres and should be a hit. Getting away with it has rarely been this much fun.