

# PALO ALTO DAILY NEWS

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Friday Aug 3



Courtesy of Dragon Theatre Productions

Dragon Theatre production of "Juvie" doesn't stand up to time.

works on the youth theater circuit.

Palo Alto's Dragon Theater is currently running a production of "Juvie," featuring two Palo Alto High School students and other youth performers, at Dragon's intimate 42-seat theater space in downtown Palo Alto.

In "Juvie," a dozen teenage offenders hang out in a holding pen, incarcerated in a grim juvenile detention facility, awaiting arraignment, trial and sentencing.

The play consists mostly of monologue vignettes as one or the other of the offenders steps forward to tell his or her story about how he or she ended up there. There are occasional two-person scenes, as well, and some random trash talking among the inmates.

The crimes they recount include home burglary, shoplifting, bookie running, drug dealing, weapons possession, probation violation, running away from home, vehicular manslaughter and assault.

One girl tells of selling heroin on the street. Another, incarcerated on her third arson charge, recounts her fascination with setting fires. Two boys re-enact a convenience store beating followed by a police car chase.

Designer Cy Eaton's wall of prison bars initially puts the entire stage behind bars. Later, it pivots 90 degrees and divides the stage into two holding pens, one for boys and the other for girls.

Under Paul Sawyer's direction, there are earnest youth performances by the focused teenage cast, including Paly students Joerelle Bennett and Jovan Bennett. "Juvie" is a short show, running about 70 minutes, including an intermission. It appears to be a play that was designed to fit into the time frame of a high school assembly period.

The main limitation of "Juvie" is its minimal dramatic structure. Everyone basically tells a confessional. Generally these confessional vignettes start at a high level of urgency. But because they don't have much higher to go, they don't contain much of a story arc, and everything operates at an unmodulated high plane of urgency.

The flavor of the crimes and their surrounding situations in this 25-year-old play also feel dated. The juvie kids of this story are on their own, genuine outcasts from their families. Many juvie kids of today seem to come more from the mainstream population.

While the drugs in 1982's "Juvie" are pot and heroin, the drugs of today's juvenile hall are meth, coke and OxyContin (a synthetic pharmaceutical version of heroin). The uncontemporary feel of these older story elements works against the production's goal of contemporary, in-your-face, gritty realism.

Additionally, in "Juvie" it often feels like an adult wrote the play's words for young people to speak, more than it feels genuinely like young people talking. There are little touches of synthetic morality in the script. ("When someone does something nice for you, you're supposed to say thank you.")

Further, there is a tone at times in "Juvie" that presents the juvenile offenders as merely victims, which doesn't seem an adequate moral picture.

The play's strongest and most dramatic moments come at the end, when the human consequences of the various teens' crimes are clarified, and the sentences are handed out.

This provides a chilling dramatic conclusion to the show, and a striking opportunity for teenagers, parents and audience members to look at some of the troubled areas of teen experience, and reflect upon them.

Rating: 2 Stars

E-mail John Angell Grant at [jagplays@dailynewsgroup.com](mailto:jagplays@dailynewsgroup.com).

What: "Juvie"

## â€˜Juvie' arresting ... 20 years ago

By John Angell Grant / Theater Reviewer

Everyone in Palo Alto knows a teenager who's been in juvie, right? Well, maybe not everyone, but I'm sure many people do. In my personal anecdotal experience, the numbers seem to be growing.

Concerned about this problem, Texas high school teacher Jerome McDonough wrote a play back in 1982 called "Juvie" that went on to be one of the most highly produced

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Where: Dragon Theatre, 535 Alma Street, Palo Alto  
Tickets: \$13-\$18

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