

## Review: 'S.O.E.'s' talented cast kicks up a storm

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Three eccentric individuals are stranded in a Boston penthouse apartment during a howling nor'easter. During this S.O.E. (State of Emergency), the temperature outside dips to deadly levels. But inside, as various shameful secrets are revealed, the psychic atmosphere reaches a fever pitch. Through it all, there's that groaning, snow-laden roof overhead, which threatens to collapse at any moment and obliterate all parties.

In her world premiere play, "S.O.E.," at the Atwater Village Theatre's Speakeasy, playwright Jami Brandli has crafted genuinely offbeat and surprisingly funny characters that a talented cast tears into with gusto. Unfortunately, flagrantly unresolved plot elements give the uneasy feeling that either one went into a fugue state for a large portion of the play, or the playwright simply didn't bother to tie up loose ends.

A newly successful author with a novel deal, Josh is never seen but is the common link among the play's disparate individuals. George (Michael Kass), a neurotic traffic reporter, has lived in the shadow of Josh, now his free-loading roommate, since childhood. Liz (Jessica Hanna), Josh's longtime editor, literary agent and lover, has recently moved downstairs, hoping to corral Josh into commitment.

Sexy young Candi (Diana Wyenn), Josh's student and acolyte, uses her sexual wiles, regardless of gender, to advance her own writing career. Their common betrayal by the monstrously manipulative Josh is the spark under the powder keg.

Director Darin Anthony's dynamic direction shifts seamlessly from the light-hearted to the cataclysmic, and his well-matched performers chart that progression with completely credible craft. However, once the play shifts from character study to unfolding mystery, Brandli should have conformed to the rules of the mystery genre. As it is now, her play devolves into open questions and dead ends that seem more careless than mysterious.