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# Thomas Tafero: A most impressive playwriting debut

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They may look like they're having fun, but this youthful trio is about to take a dark turn in Thomas Tafero's provocative debut "Liars and Lovers".

*Arena Playhouse*

**THEATER REVIEW:** *Liars and Lovers* By Thomas Tafero

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BY Robbie Woliver

There are times in people's lives when they're in the right place at the right time to witness the [debut](#) of someone who will someday become a renowned artist. It might have been April 11, 1961, when Dylan debuted at Folk City in Greenwich Village or perhaps in Berlin in 1959 when a young newcomer named Albert Albee debuted his first play, *Zoo Story*. For those who recently witnessed the month-long run of *Liars and Lovers* by Thomas Tafero, in the venerable Arena Players Repertory Theater on Long Island, hold on to your Xerox'ed playbills, 'cause this kid is primed to make a name for himself in theater, perhaps even becoming an heir to Albee's throne. *Liars* is an unapologetic three-character

play, with biting dialog, just enough humor, and streamlined pacing and tension, that's a cross between Albee's own devastating *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and the curious character dynamics of *The Big Bang Theory*.

Tafero, who was an actor before writing this notable play, digs deep into the psyche of his three characters, dysfunctional Greg and Alex, and Cindy, the girl who initiates a tense and revealing climax. The trio are young adults in college, and the fact that the actors (Michael Gilbert, Evan Donnellan and Stephanie Spohrer) were first-rate helped guide the play along without a misstep, but that seamlessness was also due to expert playwriting. The dialogue was faultless, true to the characters and never hitting a false note or falling into a lull. The ability to capture the natural language of college-age kids and not be riddled with clichés is a much more difficult feat than it appears, and Tafero pulled it off with finesse. The dramatic level continued to rise throughout the provocative two acts, but there were also many moments of wit and lightheartedness. But even then, the dark secret or looming event that you know you're being set up for skillfully colors every well-thought-out word. This was the work of a master writer, and to think it generated from someone who is at the beginning of his game makes it hard to imagine what brilliance he'll create over time.

In the play, Alex and Greg have a history that goes way back when Alex bullied Greg throughout their childhood. Both their lives took twists, mostly abusive ones, and Greg has taken on

Alex as a project, getting him into college and letting him share his apartment. Alex still bullies Greg, but there's a dark edge to Greg that is unsettling. It all comes to a head when virginal Cindy, Alex's girlfriend of two months, comes over for a romantic evening with Alex. Romance is the last thing she finds during her visit, which starts with disturbing stories by Greg and even more troubling behavior by him as he occupies her time while they both wait for Alex's return. It all spirals out of control when Alex returns, through to the following morning. The revelations are inventive and despite the fact that there is only one set—the living room of the young men's apartment—the audience is taken many, mostly dark, places during the time spent there.

Tafero, a native New Yorker, brings us a scathing and insightful look into relationships, and in a daring premiere work, he nails every aspect. He has a wonderful way with words, and it never falters, whether it is casual conversation or heady, intellectual dialogue that doesn't get bogged down in pedantic drivel. He utilizes other theatrical techniques impeccably, like never leaving loose ends and tying things together in unexpected ways. I particularly appreciated the two-month anniversary of Alex and Cindy very cleverly juxtaposed with the eight-year anniversary of Alex and Greg.

The well-regarded Frederic De Feis, who directed *Liars and Lovers*, and has been running the iconic Arena Playhouse for 60 years, has for the first time taken on one of his actors to mentor as a playwright—and it's Thomas Tafero. That's

quite an endorsement in itself.

*Liars and Lovers* will have legs, and will make it to other theaters across the country (request *your* local theater to produce it)—and make sure you see it, because you will be able to add that date to your rare list of times when you saw the debut of someone who is bound to make a distinct mark for himself in the arts. *Liars and Lovers* was truly a most impressive debut.

**IN OTHER WORDS:** Remember this playwright's name. This is how it all starts, and it's a pleasure to witness it.

**THOMAS TAFERO'S PLAYWRITING DEBUT:**  
10/10

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