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North Side benefit play warns of dark side of teen dating

By Kellie B. Gormly, PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Tuesday, February 23, 2010

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Prime Stage Teen

Prime Stage Theatre

'dont u luv me?'

When: 7 p.m. Thursday

Admission: \$10

Where: New Hazlett Theater, Allegheny Square East, North Side

Details: 724-773-0700 or [Web site](#)

About the writer

Kellie B. Gormly is a Pittsburgh Tribune-Review staff writer and can be reached at 412-320-7824 or via [e-mail](#).

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Hannah Weisberg, a junior at Gateway High School, says she felt helpless when someone close to her was hurting in an abusive dating relationship.

"Then Demi Cuccia was murdered, and that really, really hit home with me," says Weisberg, 16, of Monroeville. She recalls the Aug. 15, 2007, stabbing death of the Gateway cheerleader by Cuccia's boyfriend, John Mullarkey, who is serving a life sentence.

"I didn't know her but I thought, 'Wow, that could have been my best friend,'" Weisberg says.

Weisberg, president of Prime Stage Theatre's Teen Board, is playing a lead role in the play "dont u luv me?," a one-act show about teen-dating violence. The play, which is being performed Thursday night on the North Side, tells the story of a high-school freshman named Angela who falls in love with a charismatic senior boy, C.J. Because it's her first relationship, Angela doesn't see the warning signs of C.J.'s controlling behavior. However, her friends, and people in the audience, can see it clearly, and watch how the relationship harms Angela as she becomes more and more isolated, and the abuse escalates.

Weisberg, who is playing Angela, chose to do this play as the board's annual charity project. Weisberg says she wants to raise awareness among teens, their parents and the community about the warning signs of abusers, and how to seek help.

"I want them to know the signs and the red flags," she says. "Then, I want them to know how to get out of the relationship, and if they have a friend in the relationship, to help them. People don't realize that this can happen to them. (Parents) need to bring their children to come see this."

A lot of dialogue in the play, written by Dallas playwright Linda Daugherty, happens with text messaging, which the audience can see on a big screen behind the performers.

"It's a very interesting story," Weisberg says. "This is a story that is very relatable and very realistic."

After the play, which lasts about 45 minutes, the audience will have a chat session with the performers, along with counselors from places including the Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh. Some of Cuccia's family members -- including her mom, Jodi Cuccia -- also will attend the play and chat session. All proceeds from the play's \$10 admission fee will go to the Demi Brae Cuccia Memorial Foundation, which promotes prevention of domestic violence.

Wayne Brinda, artistic director of Prime Stage Theatre, says he didn't realize how pervasive teen dating violence was until the Teen Board members started working on "Don't U Luv Me?"

"The script is very honest and very true," Brinda says. "It gives a very accurate depiction of what happens. ... It's not just the story of the person going through the abusive relationship, but it also shows the effects on people around her."

"It's not preachy; it's honest," he says. "I think that's one of the play's strengths."

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