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Profile: C.S. HANSON

By Kate McLeod

A small detail or an offbeat circumstance is what makes the emergencies in the plays of C.S. Hanson engaging and irresistible. Hanson's landscape is instantly personal but the conflicts are unequivocally universal. We identify and invest quickly in the quirky world of her plays.

The clock ticks and the pressure piles on as characters get into trouble and try to dig their way out. Until, there is a transformation. A woman named Hannah gets interested in a guy at her coffee shop in *Stalk Me, Baby*. Oblivious, he never looks up from texting. To command his attention she accuses him of stalking her by sending her text messages. We believe he's after her and will follow her home, until she reveals her exact address and apartment number to him. Hannah has followed his phone calls about his mother's bunion surgery and his sister's break-up and has even sat behind him at the movies. It's a funny reversal of roles, but right below the surface we understand her loneliness.

Hanson's short play *Combat Dating*, draws us into sexual desire and the hopeless and hilarious fight to conquer it when a woman is overpowered by the pheromones used in the roach killer, *Combat*, on her way to meet someone she met on an online dating service. Most of us put roach killer under the sink and forget about it. Hanson stops and has a conversation with it. Sexual attraction remains a theme in *Falutin'* when a two orchestra members have an affair during intermissions. Conflicts arise and timers detonate when strings embrace wind.

Apologies to Vietnam is a comedy about an earnest anthropologist at an East Village noodle shop who wants to make amends—with curry. And another—*Charles Winn Speaks* is a one-man comedy about a Russian immigrant who has become a successful hedge fund manager who gets dumped by his American girlfriend.

While Hanson is adept at comedy her specific world turns deeply sad in more serious work like *Dakota du Nord* and *Extremes*. One sees in *Extremes*, an estranged couple thrown together for an important funeral and the gentle but overpowering dysfunction and sadness of their failed relationship that causes them to miss this important event. *Dakota du Nord (Or I Could Never Live Here)* takes us to North Dakota where a woman from the Twin Cities inherits the family farm when her brother dies. She goes to the farm to decide its fate, but it turns out to be more than an estate decision when she comes face to face with the work in his painting studio, his long-lost daughter and his ghost.

There is a truth to Hanson's work that comes with an equal lack of pretension. Her honesty is grounded in the playwright's personal experiences and her keen

observation of others. Hanson is a skilled and attentive writer of drama, adhering to craft's main literary device, dialogue, without oft-found digressions into narrative. While not a slave to Aristotelian principles she is mindful of the urgencies of forward-moving action.

Her plots and circumstances draw upon diverse situations. A woman who lets her career as a curator of Etruscan art become her life in *Etruscan Lovers and Other Fools*, eventually destroying her real life and relationship with her husband. It is the scarceness of Etruscan art and the subsequent overseeing of an obscure and distant past that appeals to Hanson. The Etruscans were destroyed by the Romans and her protection of what remains is that of an environmentalist fighting for an endangered species.

The Leak is a tragicomedy about a woman who is about to turn 40 and is leaving home to marry a man her mother has never met. *The Leak* takes on a strident and destructive mother daughter relationship.

In all of her plays, C. S. Hanson is able to share her perspective and views in dramatic and theatrical ways.