

Theater Reviews

Please Don't Ask About Becket

Electric Footlights at Sacred Fools Theater Black Box

Reviewed by Travis Michael Holder



Hunter Garner and Rachel Seiferth

Photo by Ed Krieger

There's nothing terribly original about the theme of Wendy Graf's latest play, making its world premiere in the newly reconfigured Sacred Fools Black Box space, except that the customary account of a set of twins—one charismatic but troubled, the other living in the massive shadow of her brother—has been evoked by a playwright whose powers of wordsmithery are just about perfect.

Add into the list of special forgiving circumstances that director Kiff Scholl brilliantly stages the play in an environmental 360-degree configuration on Evan A. Bartoletti's exquisitely sparse but Wonderland-yset and has lured LA theater royalty Deborah Puette and Rob Nagle to appear as the twins' parents, and most of the play's glaring clichés can be easily disregarded. Just as any in the assembly line of new novels churned out annually by Stephen King, Graf's plot and where it travels is unsurprising. But boy, can the author poetically weave a tender tale of yet another well-meaning family hell-bent on self-destruction.

Emily and Becket (Rachel Seiferth and Hunter Garner) are the spawn of Rob Diamond (Nagle), a typically overworked and highly successful Hollywood film producer who has a hard time fitting his kids into his breakneck schedule. His wife, Grace (Puette), could not be more protective of her offspring but it's abundantly clear that she favors Becket, the more outgoing and popular of her children, despite the fact that, though painfully shy, Emily is the family's scholastic overachiever. Beginning the play as youngsters playing kids' games in the woods, Emily and Becket pledge an early promise to always be there for each other before their characters mature into their teen years and then into young adulthood, sweeping the audience along to that less-forgiving time when an errant child's behavior becomes harder to excuse.

Becket, of course, continually fails at school and stays in constant trouble, able presumably to do never do anything right except sweet-talk his way out of any corner into which he paints himself. Grace covers for her son's transgressions, Rob sighs and takes urgent long-distance calls, as Emily warily watches her beloved brother annihilate himself—until she can take no more and tells him she needs a break from his dysfunctional reliance on her to always be there to bail him out. He reminds her that from early on they have had that solid us-against-them pact, but finally she tells him flat out that she's tired of "us" and no longer wants to be a part of their childhood treaty because in the process "it erases" her. The results, of course, are disastrous for her—and her parents.

Though Graf's characters offer nothing unexpected, they are tenderly conjured and arrestingly brought to life by these incredibly gifted actors led by the vision of a truly innovative director. Scholl insisted the production be staged with audience on all sides, further heightening the personal walls inadvertently erected between the members of the Diamond family while keeping the audience close at hand to wish we could step in and tell them how epically, despite their fierce love for one another, they are screwing up. It was an inspired choice, accentuated by the painfully intimate playing space itself, all conspiring to save the play from its inherent predictability.

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Aug. 20–Sept. 18. 6322 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood. Fri-Sat 8pm, Sun 3pm. \$25. (323) 960-7745.