

Q&A with Rob Nagle & Deborah Puette by Dan Berkowitz

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Okay, so at this week's surgical followup, the doctor said my knee looked "beautiful." Don't know whether I'd go quite that far myself, though it does look pretty good now that I've painted a smiley face on it. Despite a certain amount of stiffness – which will probably be there for at least another month or so – the knee seems to be coming along pretty well five weeks after the operation. Which means that soon I'll actually be limping into theatres as Mr. Critic, seeing shows and writing reviews again.

Be afraid, folks. Be very afraid...

Before that fateful day, however, I couldn't resist doing another Q&A. This time, it's with actors **Rob Nagle** and **Deborah Puette**, who are starring in *Please Don't Ask About Becket*, a new play by Wendy Graf which opens at Sacred Fools Theater Black Box on August 20.



Rob Nagle

Dan Berkowitz: In thirty seconds, can you tell us what *Please Don't Ask About Becket* is about?

Rob Nagle: *Please Don't Ask About Becket* is a family drama about four people who love each other very much, struggling with their own demons, their own identities, and their own memories of the past.

Deborah Puette: *PDAAB* is about a woman looking back on her life and coming to terms with the twin brother she loved and lost.



Deborah Puette

DB: How did you get involved in the production, and how long have you been working on it?

DP: The way I heard the story at least, the playwright Wendy Graf and one of the actors and my friend, Rob Nagle, thought I'd be right for it. Production reached out to me to see if I'd take a look at it. I've been working on it since I was cast about four weeks ago.

RN: I've known and admired writer Wendy Graf for years, and I worked with producer Lisa Brenner last fall on Meghan Brown's *The Kill-or-Dies*. I've been working on *PDAAB* since mid-July, when we had our first reading around the table.



L-R: Rob Nagle, Deborah Puette, and Rachel Seiferth in rehearsal. Photo: Kiff Scholl

DB: Rob, you're the Co-Artistic Director of Antaeus Theatre Company, which is dedicated to the classics, yet here you are starring in a brand-new play – how did that happen? Why does Antaeus only do “classics” – and I hope you don't say you prefer working with dead playwrights...

RN: I love working on brand-new plays with living writers. I've been fortunate enough to do it quite regularly in the past several years – from Melissa Ross and James Still to Meghan Brown, Samuel D. Hunter, and Jason Odell Williams. Though they do tend to speak up a lot more than dead playwrights. The Antaeus Theatre Company was founded to focus on the classics, but we've been doing “new plays” for some time now, whether it's Jeffrey Hatcher's *Cousin Bette*, David Ives's *The Liar*, Kenneth Cavander's *The Curse of Oedipus*, or our upcoming *Native Son*, by Nambi E. Kelley. We also have a Playwrights Lab where we are helping to incubate and nurture the classics for the next generation.

DB: Deborah, you're also a member of the Antaeus company. How does acting in a “classic” compare with creating a role in a new work? How does your approach to a character differ when you're playing her for the first time? Which do you prefer?

DP: The acting and approach don't differ for me between classics and world-premiere. But the homework on a world-premiere can seem more intense, especially when the play is going through rewrites, which is not uncommon. I really don't prefer one over the other. I wouldn't be able to choose between the two if you made me!



Rachel Seiferth and Hunter Garner in rehearsal. Photo: Kiff Scholl

DB: For each of you: what's it like working with Wendy Graf, the author of *Please Don't Ask About Becket*? Is it fun having the playwright there – or do you feel more pressure to “get it right” if the author is sitting in front of you?

RN: Working with Wendy has been lovely. She is open and receptive, but she also comes at the work with a strong point of view. Having writers “in the room” can sometimes prove a challenge, since they have in their heads many of the answers to the questions we the actors are asking as we explore the text and get the work on its feet. So it's always a fine balance between writer's input and actors' discoveries, but it's been a good process thus far, led by our valiant and empathetic director, Kiff Scholl.

DP: Wendy is lovely – she's very giving and open. I don't feel any pressure to get anything “right” –

rehearsal is an exploration for everyone if we're all approaching from the right place.

DB: What's a fun thing about each of you that no one else knows? (And we guarantee not to tell...)

DP: I grew up butchering the wild game my father hunted in NW Pennsylvania around our kitchen table.

RN: I can dance a mean minuet.

Hmmm, Rob dancing a minuet while Deborah wields a butcher knife – sounds like you better go see this play...!

Please Don't Ask About Becket

Written by Wendy Graf

Directed by Kiff Scholl

Through September 18

Sacred Fools Theater Black Box

6322 Santa Monica Boulevard

Los Angeles, CA 90038

Tickets: 323-960-7745 or www.plays411.com/becket.