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Review Relive the horrors of adolescence with Wendy Graf's new play 'Please Don't Ask About Becket'



Becket (Hunter Garner) and his fraternal twin Emily (Rachel Seiferth) in "Please Don't Ask About Becket." (Ed Krieger)

By **F. Kathleen Foley**

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The raging hormones of adolescence can be a destructive force that leaves stunned parents sifting through the wreckage, looking for clues about what went wrong. Playwright Wendy Graf dramatizes that poignant scenario to frequently ravaging effect in “Please Don’t Ask About Becket,” her new play at Sacred Fools Theater Black Box.

Showered with good fortune from birth, Becket (Hunter Garner) is the gifted, charismatic son of Rob (Rob Nagle), a wealthy and powerful Hollywood studio head. Less outwardly dazzling, Emily (Rachel Seiferth), Becket’s fraternal twin sister, is defined by her effulgent sibling, basking in his reflected glory throughout their childhood.

Then there’s Grace (Deborah Puette), Becket’s indulgent mother, who continues to dote on her darling boy, even as the floodwaters of Becket’s troubled adolescence swamp her family. When inevitable tragedy occurs, Emily must painfully separate from her once-adored sibling — or be dragged under.

Spanning the decades from the 1970s to the present day, Graf’s emotionally astute drama peels away layers of pathology with surgical skill, deftly exposing the blow-by-blow devolution of her beleaguered family — from the dawning realization of the problem, through the frantic attempts to normalize the untenable, and finally, to the inexorable descent that no amount of influence or wealth can reverse.

Evan A. Bartoletti’s effectively sparse set is the unobtrusive arena for director Kiff Scholl’s mostly gripping staging. Unfortunately, Scholl occasionally opts for self-conscious style over simplicity; his characters face away from one another during conversational exchanges, a device that may be meant to illustrate generalized alienation but that actually undermines emotional connections.

Despite those shortcomings, the performers are gripping, particularly Nagle as a self-made man whose own past regrets mire him in inaction. There are no demons here, nor saints, just the walking wounded grappling with that age-old question: How does the bright promise of youth so often tarnish into tragedy? For Graf’s sad survivors, there are no easy answers.

“Please Don’t Ask About Becket,” Sacred Fools Theater Black Box, 6322 Santa Mo