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scenies
contact
FAQs

PLEASE DON'T ASK ABOUT BECKET

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WOW!

Wendy Graf puts a personal face on the question of nature vs. nurture in *Please Don't Ask About Becket*, the playwright's latest family drama now getting an often compelling World Premiere guest production at The Sacred Fools Theatre Black Box.



It's through the eyes of narrator Emily (Rachel Seiferth) that we meet the Diamonds—Emily's Hollywood bigwig dad Rob (Rob Nagle), her equally privileged mom Grace (Deborah Puette), and her trouble-making twin Becket (Hunter Garner)—in a series of memory vignettes, some of them sweet with the innocence of childhood, others tainted by golden-boy Becket's lifetime of screw-ups.

Caught past summer camp curfew with weed. (Mom: "That's impossible. Becket *promised* me he never takes pot!") Kicked out of prep school for failing grades, (Mom: "You *promised* me this time.") Thrown out of yet another school for cheating. (Mom: "There must be *something* we're not doing to help him.")

The excuse-making, the guilt-placing, the strings-pulling to get Becket into school after school. (Even a senior with "grades like shit" can join the Trojans given Daddy's big-bucks donations to the USC Film School.) And nothing seems to work, not cajoling, not threats, not therapy three times a week, not even the love of an increasingly overshadowed sister.



Recognizing that there are no easy answers to what makes Becket tick like a time bomb, playwright Graf leaves it to us to determine guilt or to wonder if there may indeed be those who are simply born to be bad.

Whatever the root of his evils, Becket's victims bear the scars of his transgressions, most particularly the sister who shared their mother's womb, who now finds her stellar academic and extracurricular achievements taking second place to her brother's failures, and who, by the time of the play's flash-forwarding prologue, has taken to calling herself an only child.



If ever there were a play to make you want to shout out “Stop making excuses,” “Stop enabling,” “Start showing some tough love,” Please Don’t Ask About Becket is that play.

If ever there were a character to make you want to strangle him in one breath and hug him to death in next, Becket is that character.

That’s not to say that Please Don’t Ask About Becket is a perfect play. With so much “And then this happened, and then that happened,” Graf’s follow-up to No Word In Guyanese For Me and All-American Girl often feels more like one of the aforementioned solo shows than the Glass Menagerie-like memory play it could be.

Still, under Kiff Scholl’s assured direction, attention never flags as the production’s in-the-round staging at the former Elephant Theatre turns its audience into flies on four walls.



In his fourth major role in just the past ten months, Nagle once again proves himself one of our best and most versatile acting chameleons as a Hollywood power-broker at his wits’ end where family is concerned. Puette too has many fine moments as a mother about whom the best one may possibly be able to say is, “She means well.” Up-and-coming film actor Garner makes a promising stage debut as Becket, a role he fits to physical perfection.



Most memorable of all is Seiferth’s deeply felt, frequently heartbreaking, incurably plucky Emily, carrying the weight of Graf’s script on her shoulders and running with it to powerful effect.

Evan A. Bartoletti’s darkly whimsical set has been imaginatively dressed by properties designer Bonnie Bailey-Reed and impeccably lit by Kelley Finn. Cricket S. Myers’ sound design adds subtle highlights throughout while Wendell C. Carmichael’s bevy of costumes reveal both era and character.

Lisa Brenner is executive producer for Electric Footlights. Additional producing credits are shared by Racquel Lehrman (producer) and Victoria Watson (associate producer, both for Theatre Planners) and Susan K. Coulter (associate producer for Electric Footlights).

Kevin Tamay is stage manager and Erica Lawrence is production stage manager.



Like Graf creations before him, Becket Diamond will have you wondering, at what point could somebody, anybody have stopped this train wreck from happening? Though its title entreats you not to, you *will* be talking about Becket.

The Sacred Fools Theater Black Box, 6322 Santa Monica Blvd. Los Angeles. Through September 18. Fridays and Saturdays at 8:00. Sundays at 3:00. Reservations: 323 960-7745

www.plays411.com/becket

–Steven Stanley
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