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Don't Ask Me About Becket

by Dale Reynolds
Contributor
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Wendy Graf's full-length play, "**Please Don't Ask About Becket**," is a marvelous study of family distress and character behavior. Set in the present, but remembering the past, Wendy Graf's world premiere drama is about a high-end Beverly Hills showbiz family that has a terrible secret: Studio executive Rob (the always solid Rob Nagle) and his elegant wife, Grace (Deborah Puette), are the parents of twins, a high-achieving daughter, Emily (Rachel Seiferth), and a terminally fuck-up son, Becket (Hunter Garner).

Graf wants to explore how an otherwise close-knit family can be so unable to help their son rise above his emotional malaise. A handsome and smart kid, in and out of rehabs and private schools, Becket cannot come to grips with his various, unexplained, mental abscesses, in spite of his extremely close relationship with his bright sister, who is dragged down by her inability to disassociate herself from his superficial winnings; a father who loves his son but is more caught-up in his fragile show business career; and a doting mother who is a serious enabler of her wayward offspring.

Director Kiff Scholl exhibits a steady hand on the proceedings, allowing all the actors breathing room to explore these difficult dynamics. Graf has written a wonderfully fresh and painful look at how even the best of intentions by loving parents and siblings cannot help those who do not want the help -- either consciously, because they feel they don't deserve it, or unconsciously for no articulated reason. It is painful to live through and painful to watch, but always presented to us in non-melodramatic fashion or with glib analysis. It's an intriguing drama for today.

Nagle and Puette are professionals to the core and their two characters are never overplayed in their need for sympathy. Nor are they so emotionally strung out that they are paralyzed in their parenting. Seiferth truly carries the emotional load handily, making her Emily both strong and suffering. Garner is fine, but shows the need for seasoning, especially in his speech and his motivations.

Evan A. Bartoletti's understated unit-set is nicely framed by Kelly Finn's exquisite lighting, and Wendell C. Carmichael's striking costumes (especially for Puette's modish figure) set both character mood and place.

This is a meaningful piece, well-executed, and worthy of our attention.

"Please Don't Ask About Becket" plays through September 18 at the Sacred Fools Theatre Black Box, 6322 Santa Monica Blvd, Hollywood 90038. For tickets or information, call 323-960-7745 or visit www.plays411.com/becket.

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