

Dating is dangerous in 'Becky Shaw' at Dobama

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Dobama

Becky Shaw at Dobama

Rating: ★★★★★

Dobama Theatre proves that dating is a dangerous game in their production of “[Becky Shaw](#),” running now through March 29, 2015.

This regional premier of Gina Gionfriddo’s dark comedy explores the murky waters of dating and family drama. Directed by Donald Carrier, the twisted tale introduces us to Suzanna (Lara Knox), whose father has just died. When her mother, Susan (Laura Starnik), brings a date to the discussion about the family estate, things get awkward. Insert a self-absorbed pseudo-brother named Max (Geoff

Knox) into the mix and it's hell-on-wheels energy right out the gate.

It takes awhile for the actual dating plot to emerge, as the first portion of the show focuses on the tangled web woven amongst these family members. Suzanna (the daughter of the deceased) is in mourning and somewhat concerned about the family drama. Susan (the dead man's wife) sees the passing as "an old man dying peacefully... not a tragedy at all." Max (the adopted son) just needs to get the finances squared away and has to get everyone on the same page. From the moment these actors hit the stage there is no "down" time, as they are at each other without mercy.

After finally getting through the long family prologue, we find Suzanna married to Andrew (Ryan Zarecki), who states, "I love that you are not a psychopath." Foreshadowing, anyone? The couple wants to set up Andrew's new co-worker Becky (Anjanette Hall) with Max. The date goes horribly wrong when the couple is mugged, leaving Becky to flounder in her emotions over what happened, as Max avoids it.

Bring out the crazy! When Max won't call, sweet Becky goes into cuckoo mode to get his attention. The whirlwind of Becky leaves the rest of the characters to deal with her mess and their own personal demons. Questions are raised: Do we ever really know each other? Do we make our own lives toxic? Is intimacy really just a prescription for misery?

The actors are wonderful, all giving unique performances.

Lara Knox is a real, relatable Suzanna. Her character is genuine, layered and believable as a person working out their grief and dealing with situations as best they can. Suzanna is emotional, vulnerable and yet layered with an inner sizzle and passion.

As Susan, Starnik has the guilt trip down. Playing the mother, her offerings are a mix of wisdom, wit and matronly annoyance amidst the tumult swirling around her. A domineering lady with MS, Starnik's Susan offers plenty of levity amidst the death and deception chatter.

Geoff Knox is a deliciously pompous, cold-hearted sociopath as Max. One of the descriptors regarding Max is something to the effect of "No crying / Big dick." A cynical man at best, Knox's portrayal doesn't leave the audience anything to love about Max, except hating him... which is the point. The riveting character is emotionally challenged and pessimistic in love. Think Barney Stinson from the TV show "How I Met Your Mother," except darker.

Zarecki is a loveable, down-to-earth Andrew. He is a rock for Suzanna's grieving heart and provides a tender, goofy angle to the "cray cray" that unfolds. He is the "good guy" of the story.

Hall is a delightfully complex Becky. Her first presentations show Becky as a bit of an outsider, down on her luck and looking for new friends. As the play progresses, the coatings of fragility, clinginess and desperation begin to show through, all with slick layers of manipulation built in.

All actors are superb and interesting to watch. The set has a modern contemporary feel with some throw-back elements (thank you designer Cameron Caley Michalak for the NKOTB poster). The lighting by Marcus Dana is appropriate, as is the nostalgic sound by Richard Ingraham (thank you for the Tori Amos song during intermission).

It's a tumultuous piece layered with laughs and lots of "things that make you go hmmm."

"Becky Shaw" runs now through March 29 at Dobama Theatre, located at 2340 Lee Road, Cleveland Heights, OH 44118. Tickets and more information can be found at www.dobama.org.



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