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# CRITIC'S CORNER

## Honest 'Rabbit Hole' Avoids Sentimentality

### Production Is One Of Season's Best

**By Barry Gaines For the Journal**

As a student, David Lindsay-Abaire was told by a teacher, "If you want to write a good play, think of the thing that scares you most in the world." When he became a father, he knew his topic: the death of a child. The result is the Pulitzer Prize-winning "Rabbit Hole," and the production at the Adobe Theater is one of the highlights of this theatrical year.

As the play opens, suburban wife Becca is folding children's clothes while talking to her flighty sister, Izzy. We learn that the clothes belonged to Becca's 4-year-old, who — eight months earlier — was struck and killed by a car. We also learn that Izzy is accidentally pregnant. We meet the girls' mother, Nat; the husband, Howie; and even the driver of the car, a teenager named Jason.

This topic is easily associated with made-for-TV movies where scenes of tragedy and triumph coax tears from daytime audiences. Lindsay-Abaire's play is masterfully written, substituting honesty for sentimentality, and subtly evoking empathy through audience connection with the characters rather than the guilt of being heartbreakfree.

"Rabbit Hole" captures the incongruent modes of grief and the friction inherent in family conversation where there is really nothing to say. Yet the play ends with signs of hope and healing.

Under the imaginative, sympathetic direction of Leslee Richards, a fine cast makes the most of this wonderful play. Aleah Waldron plays Izzy, all slouch and irresponsibility. She finds herself in the middle of one family triangle or another. Waldron imbues Izzy with vitality and attitude. As mother Nat, Linda Williams gives her best performance that I have seen. She creates a believable character — annoyingly garrulous yet aching for communication. Williams' character, like all parents, wants to shield her daughter from what she herself has suffered. Daniel Hart acts the role of Jason well, but he needs to slow down his delivery.

As Howie and Becca, Taunya Crilly and Zane Barker (himself an expectant father) are at the play's vortex. Barker is excellent as Howie, his pain palpable as he gropes toward a new understanding of the world. Crilly is amazing as Becca. She impressively conveys her character's anger and frustration as she tries to reassemble and redefine herself after her loss. The tears onstage and in the audience are earned rather than demanded.

The play's title refers to the possible portal to an alternate universe where events are different, and there is much reference to Margaret Wise Brown's children's classic "The Runaway Bunny," in which the mother tells her son, "If you run away, I will run after you. For you are my little bunny." There is a lot to think about.

**If you go**

**WHAT:** "Rabbit Hole" by David Lindsay-Abaire

**WHERE:** The Adobe Theater, 9813 Fourth NW

**WHEN:** Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. through Sept. 7

**HOW MUCH:** \$12 general public, \$10 seniors and students. Call 898-9222 for ticket information