

BACKSTAGE

THE ACTOR'S RESOURCE

Mr. Marmalade

Reviewed by Jon Steely

April 22, 2009

Isn't marmalade supposed to be sweet? Not according to playwright Noah Haidle, whose dark comedy revolves around the abusive and downward spiraling relationship between 4-year-old Lucy (20-something Shannon Nelson) and her imaginary adult friend, Mr. Marmalade (Gary Karp).

Haidle's Mr. Marmalade ain't sweet. He's a violent workaholic with a cocaine habit and a briefcase full of pornographic sex toys. It doesn't take long to deduce that precocious Lucy's imagination is fueled by her front-row seat and backstage pass to adults behaving badly.

A neglectful and promiscuous mom and a lazy slut of a babysitter (the terrific Megan Grey Gobel's hilarious version of Kelly Bundy) may be the very role models who influence little Lucy to cheat on Mr. Marmalade when he loses sexual interest in her and upsets her with his penchant for brutally assaulting his personal assistant. Lucy hooks up with Larry (James Paul Xavier), a nonimaginary, suicidal 5-year-old kleptomaniac, and then things really start to get crazy.

Despite the disturbing nature of the material, director Justin Waggle moves the action along at the pleasant pace of a sitcom, keeping the stage set for pitch-dark punch lines and a nice portrait of a world gone wrong as seen through the eyes of a lonely child. Nelson's soaring performance beautifully shows Lucy as both neglected child and neglected woman, an innocent toddler plagued by adult-sized desires. As Mr. Marmalade, Karp hits his marks during the moments when he's supposed to be minding his manners but lacks the maniacal Dennis Hopper sting required to give the role the twisted intensity Haidle meant it to have.

Mr. Marmalade is a funny play. At times the laughs are strong enough to overpower the play's message about the difficulty of being a kid these days. Maybe a play about the damage to the psyche of a child of dysfunction shouldn't be so funny? Maybe?

*Presented by Theatrevolution at the Two Roads Theatre, 4348 Tujunga Ave., Studio City.
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(800) 838-3006 or www.theatrevolution.com*