



Tweaked

New Leaf Endeavors at the Meta Theatre

Reviewed by Les Spindle
AUGUST 10, 2011



Photo by Kirsten Kellogg

The ravages of drug addiction have often been dramatized—for example, in compelling works such as "Long Day's Journey Into Night" and "A Hatful of Rain." Paul Shoulberg's darkly amusing yet ultimately harrowing "Tweaked," about the attempts of two crystal methamphetamine junkies to kick their deadly habit, doesn't offer startling new insights, but the play is deeply affecting. The two main characters and their friends and loved ones are credibly depicted as flawed but caring humans facing seemingly insurmountable challenges. An exceptional effort from the

six-member ensemble enhances director Sean Riley's powerful bare-bones vision.

Roommates Charlotte (Isidora Goreshter) and Maddy (Robin Schultz) spend their time and energy finding their next fix. Amateur poet Charlotte is desperately lonely yet not emotionally centered enough to forge a committed romantic relationship with sweet but shy Lance (Jake Dahm), whom she meets in a coffee shop. Maddy is separated from her abusive, Bible-thumping lover, Kyle (James Tyler Johnson), and she has been barred from seeing their young out-of-wedlock daughter. Charlotte and Maddy's repeated vows to make each night of tweaking their last are inevitably broken. Nonetheless, we begin to realize that one of the roomies shows suppressed inner strength, while the other appears headed on a fast track to self-destruction.

Schultz creates a heart-wrenching portrait of a woman who is distraught to be separated from her child yet self-defeating in her efforts to prove she can turn over a new leaf. Goreshter brings nuance and authenticity to the subtler yet no less difficult role of Charlotte. Dahm offers comic relief as the bungling but determined nice guy who falls for Charlotte, while Johnson is chilling as a self-righteous man unable to recognize his own severe character defects. Providing strong support are Shawn-Caulin Young as a desperate junkie, prone to fits of paranoia as he crawls the floor in search of tiny morsels of narcotics, and Brent Harvey as the scummy supplier who preys on the women's weaknesses. This debuting company is definitely one to watch.

Presented by New Leaf Endeavors at the Meta Theatre on Melrose, 7801 Melrose Ave. #3, L.A. July 29-Aug. 21. Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 7 p.m. (323) 960-7773 or www.plays411.com/tweaked.