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New City Stage revives 'Pterodactyls'

By Toby Zinman

For The Inquirer

Pterodactyls, Nicky Silver's quirky, funny, sad social satire, is having a nifty revival by New City Stage. Silver grew up on the Main Line, and there is much bashing of that moneyed world in his play populated by alcoholic parents and deranged children. It is to the playwright's credit that his bashing goes way beyond those easy targets.

A gigantic dinosaur skeleton stands in the living room. Todd (the excellent Jered McLenigan) has assembled it from fossilized bones he finds in the yard, as "a grotesque monument to the transience of everything." He should know about transience: He has returned to his parents' mansion with AIDS. "In the beginning there were dinosaurs," he intones. "They lived. Not in harmony."

Emma, Todd's sister (Ginger Dayle), is afflicted with many convenient neurotic ailments, including loss of memory and deafness. Her mysterious and possibly incestuous relationship with her banker father (Bruce Graham) lurks under the surface, and her postmortem report reveals her long-repressed lesbianism. Her fiance (Kevin Meehan) finds his real calling when he replaces the family's maid - dress, apron, and all - and finds his true object of desire in Todd.

The matriarch of this messy bunch is Grace (Cheryl Williams in a brilliant, nuanced, and clever performance), whose love for Todd seems excessive and off-kilter. She is the unstoppable party planner - never mind whether it's a wedding or a funeral. "Remember that party I gave for the new lawn jockey?"

Things go from bad to worse - the events are surprising, even if the downhill movement is not. It is to director Brenna Geffers' credit that the tonal shifts slide rather than lurch, combining these characters' self-indulgence, exasperation with one another, rage, terror, and just plain weirdness.

The highly relevant point (even after 18 years since the play was new) seems to be that the privileged classes are on the road to self-extinction and that the human race, "raping the planet," may be following right along, on the dinosaur trail.

Pterodactyls

Presented through March 27

by New City Stage Company

at the Adrienne Theater,

2030 Sansom St. Tickets: \$18-\$24. 215-563-7500 or www.newcitystage.org.

Link:

http://www.philly.com/philly/entertainment/20110307_New_City_Stage_revives__Pterodactyls_.html#ixzz1JBa4ImeD

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