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JULY 20, 2006

Austinist Theatre Review: *The Play About The Baby*



Ah, smart theatre. Clever people making good decisions – articulating concepts effectively and concisely without any messy spills or sloppy emotional baggage. For better, and (occasionally) for worse, **Coda Project's** production of *The Play About The Baby* is most definitely theatre of the intelligent variety.

Firstly, they've chosen an incredibly clever script. It's no surprise that *Baby's* creator, **Edward Albee**, is sometimes referred to as the "best living American playwright". True or not, there's truth *in* that statement, to be sure. His scripts are playful, witty, surreal, funny and fantastical. His characters are focused, driven, motivated and full. *The Play About The Baby* is no exception.

Nearly all of this is captured in director **Kate Meehan's** presentation. Aided by some fantastic dramaturgical work by **Josie Tucker**, Meehan's actors deliver a well-executed telling of the story – consistently making clear, concise acting choices. The young couple is distinctly outlined, as both Boy (played by **Scott Geier**) and Girl (**Maggie Wilhite**) bubble over with youthful exuberance and unchecked sexual energy – the audience understands their purpose in the play immediately. Man (**Zac Crofford**) and Minvera (**Lisa Scheps**) – the odd, surreal outsiders who mysteriously exist both inside and outside the world of the play – are likeable and loathsome from one minute to the next, with each passing moment a further illumination of their place in the story. We understand *what* we need to, *when* we need to, without getting anxious at the playwright's absurdist, and occasionally random literary style.

But although our brains were engaged, we still left feeling like we didn't...fully...experience the story...

This is the *worse* part of a smart theatre experience. Caught up so much in its own intellectual accuracy, this production lacked the emotional explosiveness that permeates Albee's script. Even in a small, intimate space like the **play! Theatre**, where the energy of the actors is almost palpable, we were never truly captivated, overwhelmed, moved to tears, or otherwise emotionally instigated. *Baby* has the power to create an experience that transcends your commonplace night at the theatre – ripping your mind and your soul from its everyday level of consciousness – and this production, although solid in its approach, was disappointing in that regard.

That said, you're still in for an entertaining evening. Watching Lisa Scheps' Minerva wax theatrical on youth, love, etc, could've been a show in itself. Scott Geier and Maggie Wilhite as Boy and Girl share some truly vulnerable, emotionally connected moments – especially in the play's final scenes. If you're not the type to sit through a play analyzing the script and what it might have been, then in all likelihood you'll leave un-encumbered by the frustration at missing what *could* be so much more.

The Play About The Baby is a solid outing from Coda Project – with a few more risks, it could have been stunning. Could haves and what ifs aside, however, it's well worth seeing.

The Play About The Baby
Coda Project at the **play! Theatre**
Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 8pm
[Tickets and info](#)

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