Theater Review: Nothing Without a Company's 'The Kid Thing' is Fulfilling & Authentic

Submitted by PatrickMcD [1] on March 18, 2017 - 11:35am

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CHICAGO – Like the awesome Engine Who Could, the mighty Nothing Without a Company stage crafters have constructed another triumph at their new home in Berger Mansion on Chicago's north side. "The Kid Thing" – written by Sarah Gubbins – is a terse, convincing and emotional play about fear, identity and breeding, and it is performed by its cast of five with utter authenticity. The show has a Thursday-Sunday run at the Berger North Mansion through April 15th, 2017. Click here [21] for more details, including ticket information.



Play Rating: **5.0/5.0**

The story involves two lesbian couples at crossroads. They have been "family" for years, but suddenly the intimacy is challenged by one of the couples announcing their pregnancy. This opens a Pandora's Box of issues – especially for the non-pregnant couple – and director Jake Fruend and the cast interprets Gubbin's play with emotional expression and the "real life" of the situation. That strength is backed with flawless production design by Alaina Moore, and how it perfectly uses its new Berger Mansion space. The atmosphere that is created is like peering into five lives, that speak not only for themselves, but for all of us.



LtoR: Taylor R. Craft, Anna Rose II-Epstein, Samantha Michelle Nava and Shalyn Welch of 'The Kid Thing'
Photo credit: Christopher Semel for Nothing Without a Company

Margot (Taylor R. Craft) and Nate (Anna Rose II-Epstein) are telling their best friends Leigh (Samantha Michelle Nava) and Darcy (Shalyn Welch) that they are pregnant. Leigh is ecstatic for them, Darcy is less so – and this opens up an argumentative discussion about "the kid thing" between the couple, and exposes some weaknesses in their relationships. Later, Nate tells Leigh that their sperm donor was a mutual college friend, Jacob (Gabriel Fries). Leigh, at first going behind Darcy's back, schemes to use Jacob as their donor as well. The complications that arise from the plan are the juice for changing perspective and lives.

The actors are exquisitely compatible, and understand their motivations so truthfully that it generated real joy and pain. Shalyn Welch – in her Chicago debut – is the "villain" of the piece as Darcy, but unfolds the character so vividly that she defined empathy…Ms. Welch was amazing to watch. Her Darcy was an insecure and open wound, masked behind her hard-charging job and alcohol consumption. Samantha Michelle Nava as her partner Leigh is a ideal counterpoint, having felt the couple's frustration for years, and in finally taking some steps herself, goes in a right direction for her.

The other couple, the pregnant ones, expresses how the evolution of that decision moves a couple forward, even as they have fear and secrets. Anna Rose II-Epstein as Nate challenges her character's backstory as somewhat frivolous by taking on a new glow of happiness and determination with impending parenthood. Taylor R. Craft as Margot has surprising conflicts to reveal, but uses that contradiction to get decisive, and commanding. All the women are top performers, and live their parts as truth.

The single male character in the play – Gabriel Fries as Jacob – created a distinction from what could have been just a straight white male alpha role. His sensitive turn is also not without conflicts, but his pragmatism and willingness to find clarity in the donor mode is a revelation. His confrontation with Darcy, both in secret and in the open with the others, was a marvel to watch between Fries and Shalyn Welch. Jacob's actions transforms and adds vitality to the story.



Anna Rose II-Epstein is Nate in 'The Kid Thing'
Photo credit: Christopher Semel for Nothing Without a Company

The play was written in 2009, and as Nothing Without a Company co-artistic director Hannah II-Epstein pointed out in her introduction, much has changed since then. But what hasn't changed is human nature, and the fears of Darcy regarding the treatment of "butch" lesbians, which keeps coming to the surface behind "the kid thing," are still prevalent as scapegoats in American society. And this also points to all of our fears and perceived weaknesses – could we survive such scrutiny? While the play is about the kid thing, it also communicates the soul of what it means to be human.

Nothing Without a Company is at the top of their form, and I would recommend seeing them at this crossroad, as they keep tearing up the meaning of "storefront theater," and redefining what stagecraft can be… as a reflection of truth that mirrors what can happen to all of us.

Nothing Without a Company's "The Kid Thing" takes place Thursday-Sunday nights @ 7:30pm through April 15th, 2017, at the Berger Mansion North Building, 6205 North Sheridan Road, Chicago. Featuring Anna Rose II-Epstein, Samantha Michelle Nava, Shalyn Welch, Taylor R. Craft and Gabriel Fries. Written by Sarah Gubbins. Directed by Jake Fruend. For more information about Nothing Without a Company, click here. *[22]*

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