

# The Tennessean

## THEATRE REVIEW: Elements not quite in sync for *Three Days of Rain*

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It's hard to make lightening strike twice. Tennessee Repertory Theatre's "Three Days of Rain" comes close.

Mockingbird Theatre opened its production of Richard Greenberg's 1997 Off-Broadway hit in October 2000 at Belcourt Theatre with David Alford, Shelean Newman and Paul Michael Valley under the direction of Rene Copeland. Six years later, Alford, Newman and Copeland are revisiting their earlier triumph with Ross Brooks taking over the characters played by Valley.

Greenberg's New York City-set story has its first act in 1995 and its second in 1960. First we meet Walker (Alford), the overwhelmingly neurotic son of a famous architect; his sister Nan (Newman), an emotionally even-keeled wife and mother; and Pip (Brooks), an actor who was their childhood friend. The first act offers us the conclusions these three have made about their parents, Ned, Lina and Theo; in the second, the same actors take on those parental roles with some surprising revelations.

The script contains very literate dialogue, and it's a challenge for actors to make that kind of speech feel spontaneous and realistic. This cast has no problem doing so, and individually their fully-fleshed performances are very entertaining and illuminating.

What keeps this production from flying as high as its 2000 counterpart, though, is the passage of time and the age difference between the cast's newcomer and his veteran colleagues. Alford, Newman and Valley were close in age; Brooks is several years younger than his two co-stars and looks it. That may not be as big a deal in an amateur production, but when the state's biggest professional regional theater is producing the show, such a detail matters.

For example, Walker's look may have been impacted by a rough life, but he's only about 31, according to information we get from the dialogue. In the intimate space of Johnson Theater, it's readily apparent that Alford is several years older than the character he's playing, particularly when the baby-faced Brooks is onstage. Newman still has youthful beauty, but even she comes across as noticeably older than Brooks, although the characters they play are supposed to be quite close in age.

There's also a technical matter that inhibits this production. The drafting table that sits upstage in Gary C. Hoff's detailed apartment set blocks the view of the apartment's kitchen space for some of the audience seated near that table. It may seem a small matter to others, but if you're sitting there and can't see all the action, it's a notable deficiency.

Copeland's direction is once again sure-handed, and there are some really nice lighting effects by Phillip Franck, particularly during the second act rainstorm that's referenced in the play's title.

This "Three Days of Rain" doesn't quite attain the heights of the 2000 Mockingbird presentation, but it's still worth seeing. Together, the show's actors may not look quite right, but their talented character interpretations are marvelous to watch. •

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