

Based on a novel by Kathleen Hudson which is based on a true story about her son, this is a straightforward tale of a guy who had a lot going for him but chose instead to not pass go and rush straight to hell. In the stage adaptation by Stephen Stahl, the hero, Jake, becomes a hardcore heroin user in the space of a few scenes, proceeds to wallow in his addiction for a while, and then finds sobriety and salvation.

The opening is delightful and full of promise. Three of the company can sing and do a fabulous version of "Remember When" with piano accompaniment, while a slide show takes us from Jake's birth to his current pre-teen self (played effectively by Deama Aitkin).

We then meet Dad and the football. Dad's expectations are thwarted when his young son has a football injury that will keep him off the field for, as it turns out, forever. Dad just doesn't accept such realities and Jake mistakes this for Dad just not accepting him. Jake is really angry at the world, and himself.

Jake, now grown into the buff manliness of actor Adam Ratcliffe (in spite of his evil ways), has hit the absolute bottom, living in the city's piss-lined alleys squatting with lover/fellow junkie Nikki. They produce a kid along the way and he starts to think maybe he made a mistake? Not until this point, long into the play, do Mom and a counselor—followed by Dad, Sis, Jake's younger self and God—show up to celebrate his efforts to get right and sober.

Thank goodness there are some terrific things about the production worthy of praise. The opening set (designed by Ralph Castaldo) is an empty black box space with a platform off to one side and a backdrop that is an abstract construction both imaginative and compelling. It had me thinking of crumbling ruins, 9/11, and things like that. It's whitewashed and serves as the screen for a series of projections that are a sort of visual music behind and through the stage action, sometimes, unfortunately, competing with it.

The combined efforts of the designers gathered here are often extremely effective and beautifully done, but sometimes the effect is as cloying as a Hallmark card. Adam Larson does the polished and beautiful projection design; Ryan J. O'Gara creates equally wonderful lighting for the scenes. Music and sound design by Brett Jarvis add another strong element to give this script some muscle. One memorable scene occurs at a wild, drug infused concert when Jake and his friend Dunn, one of the fuller characters thanks to the work of Paul Hufker, give in to their drug-induced high and the pounding music and become frenzied and primal. This is the work of Al Foote, the fight director. It is exciting and beautiful stagecraft.

In another scene Jake and his girlfriend Nikki are junk-sick and cornered like rats in an alley, only venturing away from their lair long enough to score money or dope. Their writhing misery and ritual enslavement, amplified by excellent production values, is pretty powerful stuff to watch.

PERFORMANCES

Tue - Fri at 8pm; Sat at 3pm, 8pm; Sun at 3pm

TICKETS

212-868-4444

CAST

John Dalmon, David Goldshteyn, Jules Hartley, Annette Hillary, Paul Hufker, Patrick Knighton, Carolin Haydée López

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY

Stephen Stahl

SETS

Ralph Castaldo

LIGHTING

Ryan O'Gara

COSTUMES

Joanne Haas

SOUND

Brett Jarvis

MUSIC DIRECTOR

Bill Jolly

FIGHT DIRECTOR

Al Foote

PROJECTIONS

Adam Larsen