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An excellent revival of an Albee play

By Keith Kreitman

"A Delicate Balance" asks troublesome questions.

How much do we owe to those family and friends who have been closest to us? What "rights" do those others have to upset the "delicate balance" in our own lives? And, playwright Edward Albee explores these questions in a 1966 Pulitzer Prize winning play that does seem rather heavy and pedantic after the 42 years that have since elapsed. There is an abstract ring to the dialogue that tests one's sense of immediacy and reality as it begins unravelling the details in the history of an affluent suburban family. This is a story in which is imbedded much of the playwright's own adoptive family history.

The household contains husband/father Tobias (Dan Roach) and wife/mother Agnes (Mary Horne), whose intimate relationships have long since cooled. Then, there is Agnes' alcoholic sister Claire (Monica Cappuccini), a former lover of Tobias whose "right" to impose upon and live with the family rests upon blood relationship. And there is the daughter Julia (Rachel Joseph) returning from a fourth failed marriage, who is asserting the "right" to return permanently, if necessary, to the family nest.

Intruding into the family scene one night are Harry (Bill C. Jones) and his wife Edna (Shareen Merriam), who are exercising the "right," as best friends and godparents to the daughter, to seek permanent shelter in their home from a nameless terror that is driving them from their own home.

And so the "delicate balance" among and between family members and best friends is being tested, while the bare bones of their true feelings for each other are becoming exposed as the concealing flesh is being torn away in emotional interchanges.

Albee uses the rather hoary device of the playwright's "truths" coming from the loosened lips of a character in an alcoholic haze and Monica Cappuccini does a super job in that role. She emerges as the only truly sympathetic figure in the entire menagerie.

The daughter becomes insecure and emotionally unhinged as she comes to realize Harry and Edna may be permanently displacing her from her bedroom nest in the family home as they settle in for a permanent stay.

Harry and Edna meanwhile assert their "right" as godparents to scold her, as if she were their own child.

The question arises between Harry and Edna, would they accept this family in their own home if the situation were reversed?

There is an undeniable sense of nobility in the entire work. The wit is sharp and cutting, as only Edward Albee, whose great claim to fame is "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf," can slice it.

All the characters are well cast. With biting demeanor, Mary Horne captures the self-proclaimed "drill sergeant" nature of Agnes' role in the family. And Dan Roach is right on as the vulnerable patriarch who is ultimately indecisive and emotionally torn with respect to his responsibility to his best friends.

On the whole this is an excellent revival of a memorable play.



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