

Show People

We can't even tell you the best thing about "**Show People**" at the Dragon Theatre, and it's driving us nuts. There's a twist that comes relatively early and makes the entire show at least twice as good as it was already, and we imagine if you knew about it you might be intrigued enough to take the trip down to Redwood City and check it out... but we just can't do it. It's too much of a spoiler. Life, it seems, is not fair. But please do take our word for it anyway.

In this farce from "About a Boy" writer Paul Weitz, a baby-faced millionaire wants to convince his ingenue fiance that he comes from the perfect family, so he hires a pair of fading Broadway stars (Bill Davidovich, big and bullish and unassuming, and Monica Cappuccini, arch and shrewd and arsenic-infused) to pose as his parents for the weekend.

This sounds like a silly, contrived story, something you might see in a particularly bad Jay Roach movie or a sitcom from Hell, but Weitz makes it funny and accessible and even a little profound... and then the first surprise comes and all of a sudden you just can't bear the idea of not finding out what happens next.

"Show People" is just an excellent play, to the point that it's almost impossible imagining anyone who wouldn't like it at least a little. (The Grinch, maybe? Grumpy cat?) All of the characters are clowns in their way, but while at first they're all just reservoirs for comedy as the show winds to a conclusion they're allowed to seem tender, real and human, a progress so natural you almost don't realize it's happening. The younger actors are good, but Cappuccini and Davidovich together are what make it happen, their brash battleaxe routine eventually giving way to something compassionate and genuine.

In the beginning we questioned this set-up: In what reality would any two people agree to such a transparently bad idea? To the play's credit, it tells us: They're really desperate and love each other in such an earnest (if trying) way that they'd make this sacrifice for the sake of helping the other get by.

He's pompous and needy while she's arch and volatile, but while we've seen these types

played before they're rarely allowed this kind of substance. It's killer stuff, and that it never spoils either the effectiveness of the comedy or the rising tension as the whole mess comes to a head is even more amazing.

There's only one problem with "Show People," and we're afraid it's a big one: the ending, when it comes, is a letdown and a cop-out, not nearly as interesting or unpredictable as you'd hope given everything that went into it. Admittedly, we'd have trouble coming up with anything better, but even so, it's the one and only time the show cheats and resorts to the kind of cheap trick it's been so good at avoiding up to that point. A damn shame, but not enough to mar what's gone on before or make the show as a whole less wonderful.

"Show People" is not brilliant. It's not something that will last for generations and change people's lives. But it's a great night out, and if you get the chance, you should definitely see it.

"Show People" runs through March 22 at the Dragon Theatre, 2120 Broadway in Redwood City. For tickets and information, call 650-493-2006 or visit DragonProductions.net