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Good grief

'Too Much, Too Much, Too Many' explores love and loss

by Karla Kane / Palo Alto Weekly

Rose and James Henry had a storybook romance, full of moonlit swims and foxtrots, and kept that romance alive throughout their 40-year marriage. The downside of such a passionate, joyful, devoted relationship is, of course, the devastating fallout that occurs when death does them part.

Meghan Kennedy's "Too Much, Too Much, Too Many," currently staged by Dragon Productions Theatre Company, explores the grieving process through the experiences of the widowed Rose (Mary Price Moore, costumed with gray hair to appear elderly) and her daughter Emma (Kelly Battcher), as well as the young pastor, John Hidge (Felix Abidor), who seeks to comfort them.

Since James (W. Scott Whisler) died more than six months ago, the formerly vivacious and larger-than-life Rose has become a recluse, locked in her room with her books, notepad (she's working on her obituary) and memories. Emma has given up her own life to take care of her aging parents -- first her father, as he struggled with Alzheimer's Disease, then her grief-stricken mother. Emma hides behind her filial duty, using it as excuse to become a recluse of sorts herself, masking her own grief and trapped by a literal wall between her and Rose. There are references made to other children (and grandchildren) of James and Rose, but only loyal Emma is seen onstage.

Pastor Hidge, urged on by concerned parishioners, hopes to win Rose's and Emma's trust and eventually help them rejoin the world of the living, but stubborn Rose proves a tough nut to crack, allowing him to read Bible passages and play cards with her through her closed bedroom door but not making a move past the threshold. She gives Emma baking tips the same way, her daughter leaving food outside the door for her to snatch, snack on and criticize. Saddest of all, she implores Emma night after night to recount the grim details of James' death by drowning, repeatedly recited as if it were a prayer.

A mutual attraction sparks between Emma and the pastor and they begin to date, much to Rose's approval and satisfaction, but, while John is more than happy to listen to Emma, she's frustrated by his reticence to talk about himself and the caginess with



Kelly Battcher (left) implores her mourning mother (Mary Price Moore, right) to leave her bedroom and rejoin the land of the living. Photo by Kimberlee Wittlieb.



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which he dodges questions about his past. He, it seems, is no stranger to grief and loss and may be hiding out from some dark memories of his own.

Moore's sassy Southern belle Rose is the obvious standout, the planet around which the other characters revolve. We get a sense of the motherly love she feels for Emma and of her outspoken personality, although she's seemingly unable to face life without her longtime sweetheart. Though Moore doesn't look 78, she uses her voice and body to convey Rose's weariness. Battcher's portrayal of Emma rings true, although I wish playwright Kennedy had fleshed out her character a bit more. We don't get to learn much about her life or her personality at all, other than in relation to her parents. Whisler's James seems a bit grating when he first appears (in flashbacks), but with the growing realization about his condition comes a growing appreciation for his performance. Anyone who's had a loved one with dementia will no doubt relate to this family.

And Abidor is appealing as Hidge, who seems younger than his years and yet bears too heavy a burden for someone his age. We root for the nascent relationship between him and Emma although, again, Kennedy's script doesn't go very deep into who they are or where they're going.

This description may be making the play sound awfully depressing, but it's actually full of light moments and gentle humor, especially via Rose's quips. Although it's a sad story, it leaves the audience wistful rather than melancholy. There's nothing particularly extraordinary about this family, but audiences may well empathize with the unfortunately ordinary experience of loss.

"Too Much, Too Much, Too Many" is part of the Dragon's 2nd Stage Series, for which the theater company provides seed money and mentoring to help emerging artists bring projects to life. This show is director Nancy McClymont's vision. Her day job as a counselor no doubt informs both her interest in the play as well as her sensitive direction, which requires a keen understanding of people dealing with the pain of grief and the means they might take in attempts to avoid it. Ting Na Wang's set design creates a cozy, well-loved look for the Henry house, with nice touches including a record player and vintage LPs.

2nd Stage Series productions, by their nature, tend to be a little rougher around the edges and a little less professional than main-stage shows, but they're also heartfelt and intriguing. Dragon's program is a wonderful resource for the local arts community and "Too Much, Too Much, Too Many" is slight and gentle, yet emotionally affecting.

What: "Too Much, Too Much, Too Many"

When: Through April 10, Thursday-Saturday at 8 p.m.; Sunday at 2 p.m.

Where: Dragon Theatre, 2120 Broadway St., Redwood City

Cost: \$25 students and seniors; \$30 general admission

Info: Go to [Dragon Theatre](#).



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