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### *Too Much, Too Much, Too Many*

Dragon Productions Theater Company

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Loss and love ... love and loss .. Both what once was and what might someday be. Those are the powerful threads that bind the many scenes of playwright Meghan Kennedy's examination of grief in her debut *Too Much, Too Much, Too Many*. The mysterious, tragic death of a husband/father leads to a locked bedroom door that separates all but the voices of a mourning mother and her worried daughter. A young minister suddenly shows up with a multi-step plan to build a bridge to the isolated, grieving mother and maybe also to connect to the still-single daughter. And a father's progression of Alzheimer's is remembered in bits and pieces by a daughter whose own pain is compounded by a dad who is dead



**Mary Price Moore and Kelly Battcher**

*Photo Courtesy of Dragon Productions Theater Company*

and a mother she hears but cannot see or hug. Presented with just the right mix of smiles and tears, silliness and seriousness, bittersweet and bitterness, Dragon Productions Theater Company has assembled four outstandingly cast actors in *Too Much, Too Much, Too Many*. The play premiered in 2013 in Roundabout Theatre's Off-Off-Broadway new works series.

Surrounded in her small bedroom by over-due library books, Rose spends much of her day staring into space with reminiscent sighs as she recalls the love of her life, a husband now passed some six-plus months. With meticulous writing and re-writing in a small stationery pad, she also labors over own obituary. In her flowered pink housecoat and with bundled grey hair always in perfect shape on top of her head, Mary Price Moore plays this long-faced, Southern woman full of obvious pride, dignity, and

stubbornness. She is easily a prime subject for an Annie Leibovitz photograph.

Although the door is always closed, Rose does not miss a thing going on in the kitchen. Her instincts are acute and always in full radar mode. "She looks beautiful ... I could smell her through the door," she says to herself of her daughter one evening. Her curiosity is always as alert as is her conniving. She wonders (with a devious smile and a twinkle in her eye only we can see) about the minister's looks and his hands in a ploy we suspect that has to do with matchmaking. "What about his hands? Have you looked at 'em? Look at 'em," she persists. But as her daughter sits on a stool on the other side of the closed door, Rose also nightly whispers a sad, soft plea of "Again," wanting to hear in the same, word-for-word description how her husband was found drowned—"seaweed in his hair, eyes open, like they see something ahead of them, hands grasping a little wooden bird."

Mary Price Moore could hardly be more perfect in her portrayal of Rose, never pushing the boundary too far in a performance packed with nuance. With raised eyebrows, slight smirks, deep sighs, and a face that speaks volumes of her longing for one more dance with the man she worshipped for so many years, she is a Rose wilted but still very much alive in her own way.

Kelly Battcher's Emma has that Southern, Sissy Spacek look with her tall, lean, slightly beat-down stance and blonde, stringy hair that falls on either side of her pensively burdened face. Frustrated with her own inability to affect her mom's isolation, Emma too is locked up in her own memories of her lost dad and in her perceived doubts about her own attractiveness at the ripe old age of thirty-nine. As evidence builds that the daily visits of the handsome minister are as much about her as her mother, she gives him side-glances and amused smirks while also replacing her slouchy tops for ironed blouses. But she also seems clearly irritated and skeptical of his intentions and the baggage he may be bringing from his past. Ms. Battcher does a great job walking the fine line between flirting and fleeing when it comes to the preacher, between lovingly and resentfully catering to her mother, and between recalling her Dad with a smile and with eyes full of tears.

Pastor John Hidge is the thirty-three-year-old, dimpled, bearded minister, and he barges into the secluded lives of Rose and Emma with an unwavering smile and an optimistic spirit. Felix Abidor's young preacher shows immense patience and his own stubborn streak as he too sits on the other side of a closed door reading the Bible, asking countless questions (often to no or little response from Rose), and even playing "Go Fish," passing with a chuckle cards under the door to a clearly cheating Rose. All the time, he keeps his eyes on an initially reticent Emma and moves closer and closer with a number of ploys for scoring her attention, like a casual touch, a suddenly locked gaze, or an off-guard chance to get her to unwittingly open up about herself. But as Rose notes to Emma, "His voice is full of sad." Mr. Abidor's John has clearly built his own room somewhere deep in those sometime sad eyes to lock away his own secret of loss.

The person we only see when Emma sleeps and dreams snippets of him, the deceased husband and father James, leaves the most lasting impact, given the performance of W. Scott Whisler. The sequence of her memories begins in the days when her dad still teases her with twinkling eyes and loud, exuberant voice. We then watch a stunning progression as his oncoming Alzheimer's begins to take hold—first in smiling denials that anything is wrong, then in occasional quivers of the lips and a look of not remembering what is being talked about, and on to a final, heart-breaking scene of a sobbing Emma holding a disheveled Dad who has no idea who she is or where he is. It is difficult to imagine a more telling performance of how this disease can destroy so thoroughly a vibrant soul, leaving both wife and daughter paralyzed in grief and regret months later.

There is so much to revel in the performances of this cast as they play out this touching story of love lost and love gained. What unfortunately weakens the telling is twenty or so short—often very short—scenes that are separated by total blackouts, often losing too abruptly the momentum and emotion of what just

happened. Exacerbating the sense of disruption is the decision to place a fifteen-minute intermission in a play that would otherwise maybe run in the neighborhood of ninety minutes. That break and the subsequent required recovery seems unnecessary.

But other directorial decisions made by Nancy McClymont pay off in huge benefits. We get to see how Emma gets her meals, how her laundry gets done, and what she does to entertain herself all day by a director taking a script and making it her own. The use of quiet and pause plays a big part in hearing what is really going on for each of these characters. How she chooses as director to make use of the two-room and outdoor porch set created so well by Ting Na Wang in the small Dragon space is also notable. Kudos goes also to Evelyn O'Donnell for her costumes that help us to see visually the changes that take place in each of the four persons before us. In his choice of background music through all those many blackouts, Lance Huntley does his best to create relevant bridges between the scenes.

In the end, it cannot be said strongly enough how it is the assembled cast—the right people with the right looks and skills for the right parts—who make this *Too Much, Too Much, Too Many* such a compelling, touching, and memorable outing.

*Too Much, Too Much, Too Many* continues through April 10, 2016, at Dragon Productions Theater Company, 2120 Broadway Street, Redwood City, CA. Tickets are available online at [dragonproductions.net](http://dragonproductions.net) or by calling 650-493-2006.

