

20% Theatre keeps a dark tale about dependency from becoming too heavy.

By **LISA BROCK**, Special to the Star Tribune

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Addiction issues have become such a part of the cultural landscape that they hardly raise an eyebrow anymore. Unless, that is, if the issue is sex addiction, a topic more likely to produce skeptical shrugs and salacious titters than understanding nods and shared recovery stories. It's that reaction that Kate Robin's "Anon," currently being produced by 20% Theatre Company, tackles head-on.

"Anon" starts out as a snappy, lighthearted romance. Tripp (Andrew Sass) and Allison (Rachel Finch) meet in as cute a manner as possible: She's an animal psychologist making a house call to treat his reclusive cat. Quick, clever repartee is followed by dawning attraction and a sense that these two appealing people might be meant for each other.

Then the wheels come off. Tripp begins to suffer from impotence at about the same time Allison discovers how attached he is to his extensive pornography collection. Adrift in uncharted territory, they debate whether he has a problem and if they have a future.

While all of this is transpiring, alternating scenes explore the relationship between Tripp's parents. His

father, Bert, played by Stuart Holland, demonstrates an initial amiability that seems at odds with the brittle anxiety of his wife (Kathy Jenkins Piotter). As Bert's increasingly compulsive need to engage in risky sexual infidelities is meticulously revealed, the tone of "Anon" darkens. The dynamic between Holland and Piotter is one of the strongest elements of this production, as they uncover the dangerous, claustrophobic world these two characters inhabit.

Juxtaposed with these two relationships are monologues delivered by anonymous women in a recovery group. One woman details her husband's increasing addiction to pornography; another describes how she remade her body in a vain attempt to satisfy her lover. Bleak tales of incest, pedophilia, Internet porn and more roll out relentlessly.

Robin's play is occasionally in danger of veering into platitude-heavy "recovery-speak" as it explores this dark and often distasteful material. It's to the credit of director Claire Avitabile and a confident ensemble that they are able to mine the work for its humor and humanity as well as its less savory revelations, retaining and celebrating the complexity of the various characters rather than allowing them to devolve into stereotypes.

"Anon" is given a solid production by 20% Theatre Company, but it isn't for the faint-hearted. Just as the couple of instances of full-frontal male nudity elicit gasps from the audience, the full-frontal subject matter may leave them figuratively shaken, as well.



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