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Theater Review: Circle Players, Lipscomb University team to present powerful 'Rabbit Hole'

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Circle Players and Lipscomb University's team up to present David Lindsay-Abaire's play 'Rabbit Hole.' The play follows a typical suburban family as it copes with tragedy. / Submitted

Written by **Amy Stumpfl**
For The Tennessean

Ordinary objects take on new meaning as we grieve. A favorite book or toy can alternately serve as a treasured memento or a cruel reminder of the one we have lost.

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Such objects figure heavily in David Lindsay-Abaire's play "Rabbit Hole." Winner of the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for drama, "Rabbit Hole" follows a typical suburban family as it copes with tragedy.

The story opens several months after an accident, in which Becca and Howie Corbett's 4-year-old son, Danny, was accidentally killed



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by a teenage driver. Mired in grief, the parents struggle to find a way out of the darkness, only to become more and more isolated. But despite the play's heavy themes, Lindsay-Abaire provides bits of unexpected humor and glimpses of hope.

If you go

What: Circle Players and Lipscomb University's Department of Theatre present "Rabbit Hole"
When: Through Aug. 31. Performances are 7:30 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays, with matinees at 3 p.m. on Sundays.
Where: Lipscomb's University Theater (next to Sewell Hall), 3901 Granny White Pike
Tickets: \$15 (all tickets \$11 on Thursday)
Contact: 615-332-7529 or www.circleplayers.net.

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Beth Henderson is excellent as Becca, visibly weighed down by grief and speaking with a steely restraint that barely masks her turbulent emotions. Mike Fernandez is just as effective as Howie, conveying as much with his carefully measured body language as with his words.

Wesley Paine gives a wonderfully layered performance as Becca's somewhat eccentric mother, Nat. Paine brings great energy to the role, but moments of sorrow are so devastatingly real that the audience responds audibly.

Comedy, frustration

Emily Faith offers solid support as Becca's quirky sister, Izzy, balancing comic relief with an undercurrent of frustration. She occasionally plays it a little too cool but still manages to bring a level of authenticity to the sisters' relationship.

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Jonah Jackson also succeeds as Jason, the teenager responsible for Danny's accidental death. He captures Jason's youthful awkwardness and earnest regret, but I would love to see him slow down just a bit to fully savor each painful line.

Whitney Vaughn directs the weighty drama, presented in partnership by [Circle Players](#) and Lipscomb University's Department of Theatre, with restraint and sensitivity. She makes some excellent choices along the way, starting with the use of actual "home movies." By showing us Danny (an adorable Will Cummings) and his family in happier times, Vaughn draws us deeper into the story — and our sense of heartbreak is all the more potent.

However, by placing Danny's room behind the sheer projection screen, we lose some of the subtle exchanges between Becca and Nat in Act 2. It's a tough tradeoff, but overall, the home video is a smart move.

Jim Manning's detailed set design speaks volumes about the



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Corbett family, and Jennifer Klein's costumes help solidify characters, as well. Stephen Moss's lighting is quite evocative, and Lipscomb University senior Jacob Street designed/edited the aforementioned projections.

It's always exciting to see successful partnerships among local theater companies. "Rabbit Hole" provides a strong season opener for both Circle Players and Lipscomb.

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