



Acts of Love



Pictured: Andrew Dawson, Diane Tyler, Abby Royle, and Andrew Rein in a scene from Acts of Love

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Michael Criscuolo · November 6, 2007

Kathryn Chetkovich's *Acts of Love* is a tight, compact domestic drama that is engaging throughout. In examining the lengths to which its characters go in

the name of love, the play detonates its share of dramatically satisfying moments and unveils a couple of unexpected plot surprises that keep the audience hooked.

Ed and Sheila are a middle-aged couple on the verge of celebrating their 20th wedding anniversary. To mark the occasion they've gone to their weekend summer lakeside cottage, and invited Ed's grown son, Tom, to join the festivities (Sheila is Tom's stepmom: his real mom died over two decades earlier). Tom brings his latest girlfriend, Annie, to round out the group.

Sounds lovely, doesn't it? Well, not quite. For one thing, Ed is a crotchety old coot whose brusque manner often scares Tom's girlfriends off, so he's been instructed to be on good behavior. Plus, Ed and Tom don't have the warmest father-son relationship—in fact, they're practically estranged. Ed's constant criticism of what he perceives to be his son's listless lifestyle keeps Tom at more than arm's length.

But, as *Acts of Love* progresses we learn that father and son aren't the only pair who have the potential for fireworks. It turns out that Sheila and Annie have each brought a closet-rattling skeleton with them, and the secrets they eventually reveal threaten to undo everything in the house. (Of course, this is the point at which I shut my trap, lest I reveal anything else. See *Acts of Love* for yourself to find out the rest.)

Chetkovich keeps the action confined to the lake house's living room, giving her plenty of time to build tension and explore the various vagaries of the heart that the story nurtures. Lost love is a recurring theme. Tom's mother isn't the only dead relative he and his father share: Tom also had a brother, who died weeks before his mom. Their specters continue to hover over both men. Sheila and Annie are both haunted by figures from their past, as well—in each case former lovers whose presences are still felt keenly by both women.

All of which leads the characters and Chetkovich to examine what one is willing to do for (or because of) those they love. How far is one willing to go either towards one extreme (denial) or the other (obsession)? *Acts of Love* has more than a couple of answers to that question by the time it reaches its conclusion.

Director Marc Geller does a nice job balancing both the play's lightness and gravitas, acknowledging how they both feed off of and complement each other. And his work with the

CAST

Andrew Dawson,
Andrew Rein, Abby
Royle, Diane Tyler

AUTHOR

Kathryn Chetkovich

DIRECTOR

Marc Geller

SETS

Aaron Mastin

LIGHTING

Frank DenDanto III

COSTUMES

Dennis Ballard

MUSIC

Daniel T. Denver

STAGE MANAGER

Bernita Robinson

PRODUCING COMPANY

Dangerous
Arrangement, Inc.

actors is very strong. Andrew Dawson, Andrew Rein, Abby Royle, and Diane Tyler all give excellent performances, with each actor getting a special moment or two of their own to shine. Dawson and Rein's scenes together as Ed and Tom, especially in the play's second half, are outstanding, while Royle and Tyler's scenes as Annie and Sheila crackle with an electricity all their own.

Acts of Love understands that the special types of conflict reserved only for family members never goes out of style. Chetkovich works that angle effectively without ever making the audience feel manipulated or cheated. She, along with Geller and their talented cast, make the unit-set family drama feel fresh again.

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