

## 'Under the Skin' tests the strength of the parent-child bond in its regional premiere

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The relationship between parents and children is a complex one, to say the least. Children owe their very existence to their parents, but how binding is that tie? The Public Theatre offers an entertaining look at this unique familial bond in the New England premiere of Michael Hollinger's aptly named play, "Under The Skin."

Directed by Janet Mitchko, the play stars Annie Grier as Raina Lamott, the single mom of a 4-year-old girl named Lily. After her mother's heartbreaking death from cancer, Raina moved from Pennsylvania to Ohio to start a new life away from her absentee father, Lou Ziegler. When Lou, played by Doug Rees, shows up on her doorstep in need of a kidney transplant, Raina must decide if he's "kidney-worthy."

While weighing her obligation with a literal pros and cons list, Raina meets Jarrell Hayes (Jon Hudson Odom), a young artist undergoing testing as a possible kidney donor for his "Uncle Gummy," a close friend of his mom, Marlene (Melissa Maxwell).

The Public Theatre has cast a group of Equity actors who bring humor and heart to the play as their characters navigate the thought-provoking script. They are wonderfully flawed characters, allowing the audience to find likeability in Raina's philandering father and recognize Raina's own imperfections.

"You make Hamlet look decisive," Lou tells Raina as she contemplates her paternal obligations at his hospital bedside.

Grier and Rees capture the complicated nature of Raina and Lou's paternal relationship, with Odom and Maxwell fueling the comedy and emotion as Jarrell and Marlene. Odom stood out Saturday night when tears visibly welled in his eyes after one of the play's monumental plot twists.

Odom and Maxwell further flesh out the play's themes of obligation in their secondary roles: Odom doubling as Lou's Dominican nurse, Hector, and Maxwell slipping into Lou's African doctor, Dr. Badu, and a passive-aggressive Starbucks barista.

With a bachelor's degree in music under his belt, the playwright, Hollinger, approaches his plays as if they were musical compositions, with movements, melody, counter-melody and dynamic crescendos that appear in "Under The Skin" as zany — but plausible — plot twists and fun-filled character asides that draw the audience into the play.

The Public Theatre delivers a fun and engaging rendition of "Under The Skin" that is full of surprises, laughter and underlying wisdom. It's a play that hits home as it looks at not only the obligations of children to their parents, and vice versa, but also playfully acknowledges the interconnectedness of mankind as a whole



Doug Rees as Lou Ziegler, Melissa Maxwell as Marlene Hayes, Annie Grier as Raina Lamott and Jon Hudson Odom as Jarrell Hayes in "Under the Skin."