

BACKSTAGE WEST

THE ACTOR'S RESOURCE

RABBIT HOLE

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By Travis Michael Holder

This 2007 Pulitzer Prize winner was an unexpected departure for the writer whose wonderful *Fuddy Meers*, *Kimberly Akimbo*, and *Wonder of the World* had already heralded him as one of the best — and quirkiest — playwrights of our time. As unrelentingly bizarre as **David Lindsay-Abaire's** work had been, this modest yet remarkably affecting little play immediately elevated him beyond cult status as he tackled the story of ordinary suburban family members who try to cope with the death of a child.

As the marriage of Becca and **Howie** (Courtney Cole and Jay Huguley) starts to unravel from the strain, Lindsay-Abaire finds a tender, all-too human absurdity in their situation, exacerbated by Becca's annoying but well-meaning mother, Nat (**Brynn Thayer**), and delightfully dysfunctional pregnant sister, Izzy (**Samantha Sloan**).

It takes a while before the depth of the family's tragedy becomes evident, a testament to Lindsay-Abaire's inescapable dark humor, director Allen Barton's ability to keep the proceedings from devolving into melodrama, and above all, the marvelously unadorned performances by an extraordinarily committed cast that could define the term "ensemble performance," featuring a stunning turn by Chadbourne Hamblin as the heartbreakingly tormented teenager whose own life will never be the same after Becca and Howie's son ran into the street chasing the family dog. Although Sloan's and Thayer's too-loud characters provide most of the play's sufficiently harebrained subterfuge, constantly putting their respective feet in their respective mouths, it's ironically an eleventh-hour monologue from Nat, who lost her own son many years earlier to a drug overdose, that becomes the unacknowledged turning point of the family's crisis.

No wonder this play won the Pulitzer. Our most important artists are those who possess the ability to help heal and transform our species as we collectively crash through the inequitable challenges of life. Such an artist is Lindsay-Abaire. Anyone who has ever coped with monumental loss will understand and find comfort in this masterpiece of theatrical art, a rare thing of great beauty providing a subtly inspirational burrow into which anyone in its audience is bound to take a surprise emotional tumble.