



Dynamite Hits the MAC

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The Last Five Years

by **Jason Robert Brown**

Directed by **Phillip Fazio**

[Mesa Encore Theatre](#)

The Anita Cox-Farnsworth Studio at the [Mesa Arts Center](#), [Mesa](#)

(480) 644-6500

April 13-April 29, 2007

\$20.00 - \$25.00

No it is not time to call in the police! There have not been any literal attacks on the **Mesa Art Center** and no explosions have rocked its 98 million dollar façade. But if I could calibrate the effect of a whirlwind, highly explosive performance on an audience, I would have to say that **Mesa Encore Theatre's** current production has just hit a 10 on any scale! It isn't often that I can unreservedly recommend that you see a show, especially at a community theater, where it is obvious that the standards may be a little less than those of a professional venue. But in the case of *The Last Five Years*, I have absolutely no reservations.

What is the reason for this high praise? It is a combination of two sterling performances by **Sarah Wolter** (as Catherine) and **Colte Julian** (as Jamie) and superb direction by **Phillip Fazio** and **Debra Jo Davey** which together produce a breath taking evening of theater. This script is singularly unusual since it presents its theme in two simultaneous time frames; from Catherine's point of view we start in the present and work backward in time and from Jamie's, we begin at their first meeting and move forward to today. This can be a bit confusing for the uninitiated and I must admit that the first time I saw the show, the flow was not as clear as it

was at the MAC. Simply put, the play is about love, marriage, and divorce. Sounds simple doesn't it? But as we watch these two people live through these experiences, we laugh, worry and mourn with them and begin to understand the torments of happiness and sorrow alike.

No one has ever mined her emotions as much as Wolter as she registers her feelings from desolation, to simple hurt, to uncertainty, to joy, to sweet coquetry. She is an uncanny performer with a magnificent voice and range who throws herself 150% into the role. Even as she auditions for a part (in the show) and is supposed to be a bad singer, she is terrific. Her plaintively, shy, sweet goodbye at the end of the show (which is, of course, the beginning for her) says it all without one word of dialogue. This is a completely sung-through show. Jason Robert Brown is one of our finest new playwrights and he captures the agony of Generation X as the genders war with each other over the relative place of love and professional success in their lives. It is a common story today – love no longer conquers all!

Lest I slight the talents of Julian, he too has a thrilling voice and delivers his solos with a veracity and heartfelt angst. He does an especially good job with “The Schmuel Song,” an allegory that Jamie purportedly has written for Catherine as a Christmas gift. Both he and Wolter have mastered the art of sotto voce and are dynamite in their characterizations. And both actors are blessed with the accompaniment of six wonderful musicians, consisting of piano, two cellos, one violin, one guitar, and one bass guitar, a unique grouping I would say. Davey especially is a wizard on the piano and as a musical director. This is not an easy score by any means but they ace it.

Technically, the show is fantastic. Mood lighting runs throughout and is used exclusively to change the many settings. The only 'set.' per se, is a series of cardboard boxes, a radiator, table and chair and a city skyline. But this show does not need a set; it is carried almost exclusively by two very talented actors, a creative stage director and an energetic musical director. Together they are engrossed in each other and engrossing to the audience, bringing us beautiful duets, the full gamut of emotions, marvelously simple reactions (sometimes held for many long moments) and a simply fantastic show. Don't miss it!

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