

Play raises questions about ADD

Two-year old children watch many hours of television a day. Could television be the cause of the psychological disease ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder)? Lisa Loomer's disturbing play "Distracted" looks into the question.

Over the weekend, the Portola Valley Theater Conservatory opened a powerful community theater production of "Distracted." Told in a fast-paced, sarcastic sitcom manner, the play is funny, but also tragic.

First produced in 2007, "Distracted" considers how the ADD epidemic has mushroomed in both children and adults over the last 50 years. It also looks at the billions of dollars in pharmaceutical company profits that have been created by sales of Ritalin and other ADD drugs.



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A mother's dilemma

The play focuses on a young mother trying to nurture her 9-year-old hyperactive son, who isn't doing well in school or socially. The mother consults both a school psychologist and her son's teacher, who send her to one mental health professional after another.

What ensues is a range of wildly divergent diagnoses and therapies. The



TOO DISTRACTED — Kevin Kirby and Mary Moore in "Distracted" at Portola Valley Theater Conservatory.

woman's husband asserts that their overactive son is fine; that he's just being a boy.

Mary Moore carries the show as the thoughtful and supportive mother, worried about her son, and fretting as she tries to figure out the best thing for him. Moore brings an upbeat radiance to the part, with sarcastic sitcom-y edges. Her bright spirit helps her family through the ups and downs of a difficult time. Kevin Kirby plays her agreeable, but self-absorbed husband,

willing to help if necessary, but often not emotionally present.

Dorian Dunne is amusing as the 9-year-old's frustrated, obsessive/compulsive elementary school teacher. Alanna McNaughton has both funny and serious scenes as a troubled teenage baby sitter who cuts herself. Shane Turner is effective as the young boy, playing most of his scenes shouting from his room offstage.

Director Noelle GM Gibbs has mounted a fast-paced and sometimes

sardonic production, but one that has heart. Over a bare thrust stage that uses minimal props and set, she has hung five large video screens alive with constant digital output (television programs, movies, sports, or merely the momentary quiet of a living room). The show's many short scenes are appropriately separated by chaotic, ADD-inducing, flash-mob set changes employing most of the cast.

Questions raised

"Distracted" asks many difficult questions. For example, if a kid hates school, does that mean that he's anxious, or does he just hate school? It also looks warily at our drug-taking culture. If your child's grades go up when he's on Ritalin, does that mean that Ritalin is good?

Although "Distracted" provides few answers, it asks good questions. We live in an often-disorienting world where we don't listen to each other in meaningful ways. It turns out that if we can address that problem, then we have a chance.

"Distracted" runs one more weekend only. For tickets and information, visit pvtc-ca.org, or call (650) 851-8282 ext. 105.

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