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Prodigals explores the terrain between adventure and compromise

by [Colin Thomas](#) on April 29th, 2010 at 12:53 PM



By Sean Minogue. Directed by Peter Boychuk. Presented by Twenty Something Theatre. At the Havana Theatre on Wednesday, April 28. No remaining performances

Prodigals is about that awkward period in your 20s when you realize that you might be even more ordinary than your parents.

First-time playwright Sean Minogue sets *Prodigals* in his hometown of Sault Ste. Marie. Wesley, who left the Soo to go to law school in Toronto, returns as a kind of white knight, or so his friends hope; Buddy, one of his group of pals, has beaten a man to death, and Buddy's lawyer has asked Wesley to be a character witness.

The story unfolds in a bar where all the friends who haven't escaped from the Soo hang out. They're living timid, dead-end lives, and they make a game out of mocking themselves for it. Describing the local social scene, Greg, the smart-ass of the bunch, says, "There's enough pity sex around here to make Darwin rethink his entire life's work."

But Minogue (who is a *Georgia Straight* contributor) is too savvy to simply dismiss his roots. There's an ache that runs through this play, and it's about the difficulty of negotiating the terrain between adventure and compromise. Jen, who used to date flashy Wesley, has hooked up with Nips, who works as a telemarketer. Nips treats Jen much better than Wesley ever did, and common sense says that she should stay with him. But Jen is still drawn to Wesley because he represents risk. In one of the script's loveliest exchanges, Nips asks Jen what more he can give her, and she replies, "I guess I just want to feel like I could lose you."

Minogue does an excellent job of fleshing out his characters' individual points of view. For instance, Eliot, a steelworker, is belligerent and sexist, but so overwhelmed by the project of becoming an adult that he's also touchingly vulnerable.

The play is funny, often thanks to alcoholic, unemployed Greg. "I love yoga pants on heavy-set women," he says. "It is hilarious and erotic."

Despite its strengths, the script isn't perfect. Greg drives much of the first half and, although he can be clever, he's also a manic, nonstop insult machine, which gets annoying. Characters are conveniently willing to spill their deep secrets and address difficult emotional issues head-on. And too much of the tension is about Buddy, who remains resolutely off-stage. In its current state, the script feels linear. With more focused development of Jen's story, it could have more shape.

Nonetheless, it's a satisfying evening. Set designer Jonathan Tsang uses the wide Havana stage as well as anybody I've seen. Rolling her shoulders forward and allowing a trace of hope to shine through the fatigue, Tara Pratt is seamlessly credible as Jen, and Aslam Husain is persuasively grounded as Eliot. Jameson Parker (Greg) is resourceful and gifted, but he could tone it down several degrees. Unfortunately, Timothy Johnston squanders his performance as Wesley with poor articulation and unfocused physicality. Still, under Peter Boychuk's direction, everybody in the cast delivers grittily credible emotional work.

Minogue is a promising writer. Those don't show up every day. If you run into him, buy him a beer.

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