

## THEATRE REVIEWS &gt;

## Prodigals is a notable accomplishment

by Colin Thomas on May 6th, 2011 at 1:20 PM



Sean Minogue's script is ripe with wit and with the heartache of missed opportunities.

**By Sean Minogue. Directed by Peter Boychuk. Copresented by Twenty-Something Theatre and SFU Woodwards. Directed by Peter Boychuk. At Studio T in SFU Woodwards, Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, on Thursday, May 5. Continues until May 14**

*Prodigals* talks about how we disappoint ourselves as we grow up. It's a rich field.

In *Prodigals*, which received a workshop production last year and is now enjoying its official premiere, a guy named Wesley returns from Toronto to Sault Ste. Marie. Most of his high-school pals are still there, hanging around in a bar run by Wesley's former girlfriend Jen, and joking about what losers they all are. Wesley is in town to be a character witness for Benny, one of their crowd, who beat another guy so badly that he died.

Sean Minogue's script is ripe with wit and with the heartache of missed opportunities. "Wait," Jen says to Wesley as he's leaving the bar. "Do I seem different at all?" He replies: "Listen, if you got a haircut or something, it looks good." Many of the jokes spill from

motormouth Greg: "There's enough pity sex around here to make Darwin rethink his life's work."

Minogue's characterizations are often subtle. After Wesley left town, Jen hooked up with mild-mannered Nips, who treats her with the respect that Wesley could never summon. But Jen is suffocating in the security Nips provides; she wants to think that he might leave her.

Under Peter Boychuk's sensitive direction, Tara Pratt is flawless as Jen, an invisible conduit for the character's yearning and fatigue. This is a very grown-up piece of work. Kirsten Kilburn plays Nina, Benny's hard-bitten sister, with a combination of honesty and brass that makes her instantly recognizable. Brandyn Eddy's Nips is wittily understated, Jameson Parker takes Greg's manic energy for a giddy ride, and, playing Wesley, Timothy Johnston deftly negotiates the hoops the playwright makes him jump through. Aslam Husain plays Eliot, a blue-collar worker, with the rigid physicality that often accompanies overacting, but, in some moments, he effectively reveals the character's confusion.

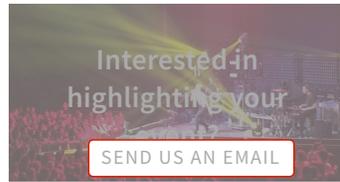
Although Minogue has rewritten the script since last year, its basic problem remains. Jen is the heart of the play and the evening clicks into gear when we hit the triangle with Nips and Wesley. But Benny, who never appears, keeps dragging our imaginations off-stage. Minogue has added soliloquies about Benny, but the terms of the convention are unclear; at first, the characters seem to be giving evidence in court, but their language belies that. And we still don't get to see the most extreme embodiment of failure in action.

Set designer Jonathan Tsang provides a revoltingly authentic low-rent bar, but the width of the playing area often places audience members at too great a remove from the actors, and the lack of containment on the sides of the set allows focus and energy to spill. The spot-on costumes come courtesy of Jane Sanden, and the sophisticated sound design is by Kevin McLardy.

The sum here is that *Prodigals* is a notable accomplishment for this team of young artists, who were all brought together by Sabrina Evertt, artistic producer of Twenty-Something Theatre.

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