

backstage★

LA Theater Review

Pay Attention: ADHD in Hollywood, on the Rocks with a Twist

By Paul Birchall | Posted May 20, 2009, 1:08 p.m.



Photo Source: Ed Krieger

Playwright Frank South's engrossing autobiographical solo show explores that unexpectedly shifting border that lies between the twin no man's lands of genius and madness. South has been challenged his entire life with the condition we today call attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, a state defined by a frequent inability to focus, hyperactivity, and impulsiveness.

And yet South's play, which sometimes appears to owe a debt of stylistic discursive gratitude to Spalding Gray, turns out to be quite different from a standard sob story "drama of affliction." It's also a Hollywood tragedy and a story of overcoming addiction, as much as it is a portrait of life with ADHD.

By any standard, his ADHD notwithstanding, South has had extraordinary success. An early writing protégé of filmmaker Robert Altman, South was also an executive producer and showrunner for the series *Melrose Place*, a gig he enjoyed for several years. During his life's ups and downs, South is haunted by a little imaginary demon, whom we at first assume is the embodiment of his ADHD. Only gradually do we come to realize that the demon stalking him is that voice of self-destructiveness that speaks to almost all of us.

South's narrative trajectory drifts through time, frequently echoing the disjointed thought processes of someone with ADHD. Although the piece could stand cutting, and some of South's digressions play as a prosaic laundry list chronology, director Mark Travis' deceptively unobtrusive staging crafts an intimacy that gradually leaves us feeling we know the star personally. As an actor, South's sometimes-halting line readings and stammering delivery are at first hard to penetrate; but, with his jowly hangdog face and mildly Mephistophelean grin, he's immediately likable, and the absolute authenticity and immediacy of the performance are striking.

Presented by and at the Other Space at Santa Monica Playhouse, 1211 Fourth St., Santa Monica. May 2–June 7. Fri.–Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 6 p.m. (323) 960-7738 or www.plays411.com/payattention.