

Realism creates richness in ‘The Flick’

A play about talking about movies

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Annie Baker’s “The Flick” — an LCC Performing Arts production in partnership with Peppermint Creek Theatre — is essentially a theater production where people talk about movies. It’s also a fascinating, methodically paced, naturalistic diorama of three people working in a small-town movie theater. What “The Flick” lacks in glitzy dance numbers and action scenes, it more than makes up for with the heartbreaking honesty of realistic characters.

The audience’s first cue that “The Flick” is different is the position of the stage. Instead of sitting in the regular seating of the Miller Performing Arts Center, the audience sits on risers where the stage would normally be and faces the permanent theater seating.

You are inside and essentially behind the screen of The Flick, a small town theater in Worcester County, Massachusetts. A man (Quinn Kelly) sits in the darkened space eating a veggie wrap, his face illuminated by the unseen movie screen. After that, theater employees Sam (Steve Lee) and Avery (Ndegwa McCloud) come into clean the popcorn assorted litter from row before exiting.

Sam and Avery talk everything. The first is Avery’s first day, two talk about movies they love hate, hopes and dreams, and Sam’s on fellow theater employee Rose (Hannah Feuka).



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If you have ever worked in a service industry job like this, you probably had identical conversations with your co-workers. But these conversations don’t bog the show down, they are the show itself. Like the intimate chats between John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson’s characters in “Pulp Fiction” — a film referenced heavily in this show — these conversations are the point and essence of the show.

Avery is a true film snob. He can connect two actors like Michael J. Fox to Britney Spears like dots with his vast knowledge of film trivia. He doesn’t believe a great American movie has been made in the last 20 years.

And unlike his co-workers, he actually loves movies and is going to college. McCloud is wonderful as the nerdy, hyperarticulate Avery who connects better with characters on screen than people in real life. If you’re a film nut like this critic, you may wish you could debate this character in person.

By contrast, Sam is a 30-something lifer at this theater who doesn't know how to pursue his real dreams. He's kind and knowledgeable with an undercurrent of self-loathing.

Lee doesn't look as old as his character, but he credibly acts like a man who has lived a hard life. Lee is solid throughout, but his best scene comes in the first act when he realizes Rose is not interested in him. As Rose flirts with Avery, Lee slumps in his seat with a sunken face and a broken heart. It's both painful and beautiful to watch.

As Rose, Feuka embodies all of the lazy charm of her slacker, tomboy character. Rose is happy to delegate her responsibilities because she's often hung-over. But she's also sexually curious and playful. For Sam, she's just uninterested. Like Sam and Avery, Rose has a flexible moral compass that justifies stealing or self-preservation as needed.

In addition to being a beautiful character study of service industry employees, "The Flick" is layered with references to great cinema like "Pulp Fiction" and "The Wild Bunch."

But they're not just lines of dialogue or cues to great movie soundtracks, they're parallel analogies about characters dealing with existential crisis and changing worlds beyond their control.

Set and Light Designer Bob Ferholz provides just enough ambiance to make the audience feel like they are in the screen watching people go about their lives.

Costume designer Chelle Peterson made some great, oversized polo shirts complete with the company logo. Further aiding that sense of naturalism is director John Lepard. As the Executive Director of Williamston Theatre and frequent guest director with MSU and LCC students, Lepard inspires strong, natural performances from even novice actors. In this case, Lepard pushes seasoned students at the end of their program to be completely real.

"The Flick" is not short (two hours and 30 minutes including intermission) but like many great movies, it earns its runtime. It may not take you to a far-away world, but it will provide a richer understanding of the world you live in.