

# Take a Ride on the Wild Side with “Becky’s New Car”



*Becky's New Car* was written as a birthday gift from a husband to his wife, and in many ways it rings like permission to make mistakes. It was not, however, the writer's wife who was on the receiving end of the production, but the wife of the Seattle commercial realtor who commissioned the piece. Written by Steven Dietz through a (genius) program at the ACT Theatre in Seattle that allows individuals to underwrite plays and make them gifts, it was created with minimal input from the sponsor, Charles Staadecker. It was well-received by his wife, Benita, when it opened in 2008, and one can see why. The play is currently playing at the Granite Theatre in Westerly through April 3 and is produced by special arrangement with the Dramatists Play Service in New York City.

Becky Foster is an over worked middle-aged woman living in an American city “much like Seattle” and opens the play by relaying a friend's anecdote, paraphrased: When a woman wants new shoes, she really wants a new job, when she wants a new house, she's really looking for a new husband, and when she wants a new car, what she's really looking for is a new life. Married to a sweet and simple roofer named Joe and working at an expanding car dealership, Becky is hitting a mid-life crisis while trying to keep her work- and family-life balance. She grapples with feelings of being undeserving of her man, of supporting her heartbroken boss as he floats through the daze of widowhood (which is adding a lot of pressure at work) and of trying to push her 26-year-old son, Chris, out of the nest. Late hours at the office leave her in the vulnerable position of being open to other options and of wanting more out of life. One night she gets to make that decision. An unrealistically helpless millionaire named Walter Flood comes into the dealership looking for staff bonus presents and offers Becky an opportunity to explore these feelings, but it is based on one small misunderstanding that she grapples with the necessity of clarifying to him until the end quarter of the play. Meanwhile she gets to try her luck at a parallel life a bit more gilded than her own and freckled with the compassion of her supportive husband and unsolicited analysis by her psychology-studying son. A mysterious woman whose face we never see purchases a fully loaded black panther of a car, intrigues everyone at the dealership with the pain she carries on her face, and causes everyone involved to collide in unexpected ways.

The cast of *Becky's New Car* ranges all the socio-economic layers and does so reliably. Michelle Mania, in the role of Becky, does beautifully relaying the mind of a tired woman seduced by the concept of relaxing. She plays a somewhat pitiable role with such energy that she remains relatable through her close calls and explanations. Let the wind run through her hair, we think, even though she's cheating on the best husband ever. Played by Steve Spartano, Joe is a gem of rock in the play. Spartano gives off a calm support we'd all envy and surprises us when it proves he's not as naïve as we think. Although we question whether a millionaire would be so kind as the Walter Flood role requires, we are convinced by the shining performance of Christopher Donohue. He is pitiable, romantic, laugh-through-your-teeth charming and genuinely heartbroken. The role calls for a lot of nuance and Donohue moves effortlessly through it. Supporting roles by Victoria Gordon (Kenni), James Auger (Chris Foster) and Veronica Strickland (Ginger) are well-executed and add parallel stories that allow for things to tie up nicely.

Although the play at times calls for scenarios that seem unrealistic (a broke heiress takes a bartending job and enjoys it) it is a fun, well-produced and enjoyable night out for anyone. Walking out I couldn't help but ask myself what trespasses I might forgive in the darker periods of partnership, something I have never had to consider. Sympathy is something we promise in marriage, but don't always deliver. *Becky's New Car* will give you a fun opportunity to sit with that thought for a bit without having your evening ruined by the morose side of the story.

*Becky's New Car* runs through April 3 at Granite Theatre in Westerly.