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Satiric dagger plunges straight into this 'Hole'

By Evan Henerson, Theater Critic

When Miranda Rosehue begins her anecdote about preparing lunch for the next-door neighbors, it feels distinctly as if we're going to be launched into a familiar cracked suburban comedy. Then we meet the rest of the Rosehue clan, and Hilly Hicks Jr.'s play "A Hole in the Dark" heads straight for the high wire.

And there it balances, rarely teetering, revealing itself as a dark and rather provoking comedy. Director Darin Anthony tackled some genially subversive material with the Blank Theatre Company's hit "The Book of Liz," but the renegade Amish cheese-ball maker of "Liz" has nothing on the Rosehues.

They're radical, extreme, blind and generally nuts. They're the butt of Hicks' satiric dagger thrusts, but — except for a rare moment or two — they're too self-absorbed to bleed. Anthony's cast, led by Jodi Carlisle as the matriarch Miranda, plays the quirks and the pathos. The play's a crazy ride.

Dad Desmond (played by Michael Adler) is an engineer who sued to win the rights to build an important bridge. In so doing, he screwed over his former business partner — and next-door neighbor — Anderson, the same Anderson whom Miranda has invited for a peace-making lunch. The Andersons are black; the Rosehues (as their name might suggest) aren't especially progressive.

The young Rosehues consist of dizzy Beatrix (Corryn Cummins), experiencing a "feminine awakening," particularly as she spies on the well-built Anderson son. Francine (played by Whitney Laucks at the reviewed production) is a militant college student who is into starvation and — perversely — her hair. Prodigal son Bartholomew (Josh D. Green) returns, not to join the family business but to take his identity quest to the South, where some Rosehue family skeletons are buried.

Beatrix "goes back" as well, via a time-travel dream, to a cotton plantation where she sees a female slave named Yippee! (Leonard Roberts) abused and exploited by the plantation owner, who may be a Rosehue ancestor. Oops. (Actors are playing double roles
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here in ways that are, in the interest of plot protection, best left to the audience to discover.)

If the play represents Beatrix's awakening, it's also Miranda's, and Cummins and Carlisle ("Don't make me drink!") get plenty of humor from their respective dilemmas. In the second act, things get a little over-the-top as the Rosehues disintegrate, but the play takes a serious-minded yet non-preachy left turn. Carlisle, once again, keeps things from going too far off track.

A skilled hand is needed for the tonal shifts, and Anthony possesses it. The laughs, wincing and — ultimately — the play's brain food are all in generous supply. And leave it to set designer Roy Rede to transform the Blank's small 2nd Stage from tacky suburban living room to antebellum plantation with the strategic opening of doors.

Quite a journey, this "Hole in the Dark" turns out to be: both physically and in the mind.

A HOLE IN THE DARK Our rating:

Where: The Blank at the 2nd Stage Theatre, 6500 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood.

When: 8 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday; through May 28.

Tickets: \$22 to \$28. (323) 661-9827. www.theblank.com.

In a nutshell: A family in crisis takes a comic/satiric look at racial bridge building.

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