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Molly Smith Metzler takes an honest look at motherhood in 'Cry It Out' at City Theatre



1

Review: Pressures of motherhood come to a boil in 'Cry It Out' at City Theatre

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"Cry it out" is a training method that dictates parents should leave crying babies to fall asleep on their own. In "Cry It Out," a seriocomic play about motherhood by Molly Smith Metzler, one new mom sees it another way. She describes the practice as "barbaric."

"I think you are *supposed* to cry when you are all alone in a dark room," Lina tells fellow new mom Jessie. "And I think your mom and dad — someone who loves you — is supposed to come help you."

It's not just the babies who are crying, or who are in need of a helping hand, in "Cry It Out." The play now at City Theatre starts out as a funny look at the joys and pains of two young mothers, next-door neighbors on Long Island who felt isolated while waiting out their maternity leaves. Relieved as they are to have each other to lean on, their situations are preordained by their circumstances.

One mom, Jessie (Sarah Goeke), a corporate lawyer, is so smitten by her daughter, she doesn't want to go back to work. The problem is, she is afraid to tell her husband. He expects to drop off their baby at the best daycare center his parents can buy, and he and his wife will get back to their lives. Jessie's pal Lina (Julianne Avolio) has fewer choices, She's the bread-winner in her family, while living with her nosy and unreliable mother-in-law.

Jessie and Lina are from opposite sides of the tracks — one quiet and introspective, the other a potty-mouthed extrovert (Avolio has lots of fun with Lina's biting sarcasm) — but they are bound by their proximity, breast-milk stains and desperate need for someone who understands.

Into their daily meet-ups comes Mitchell (Tim McGeever), a wealthy businessman who has been observing the pair walk, talk and laugh, baby monitors in hand, and begs them to invite his wife into their tight-knit twosome. She's a new mother, too, but in his version of their lives, she has disengaged from him and their baby.

"Cry It Out" has definite points of view about society's economic pressures and priorities when it comes to parenting, and what that means for how we care for our children. What comes through loud and clear from Metzler ("Orange Is the New Black"; "Shameless") are the importance of a supportive lifeline and how we are often helpless to care for our kids on our own terms.

The Mainstage set by Anne Mundell is floor-level, bringing the audience up close and into the moms' backyard world. Mitchell's arrival from a hillside of "haves" is illustrated by an illumination of the biggest and brightest home that overlooks the women's haven.

Once you get past the unlikely intrusion of the wealthy couple, the dynamics between the characters and other unseen forces become more and more unsettling, so that when you leave "Cry It Out," the comedic early going may be a distant memory.

The tone changes with the appearance of Mitchell's snooty wife Adrienne (Rebecca Hirota). She's got money to burn, a career on the uptick and high-priced nannies. We judge her for that, and for her belligerent attitude. Yet, as we have already learned, every new mother deserves to be seen and heard for who she is, and not for her circumstances or for society's expectations.

"Cry It Out" leads you down what seems to be a straight path, then reverses course. You may end up with whiplash, but you've learned a lesson about passing judgment without having all the facts.

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