

Theater review: 'Extinction' at Elephant Space

By F. Kathleen Foley

Sociobiologists could have a field day parsing "Extinction," Gabe McKinley's world-premiere play at the Elephant Space.

McKinley traverses territory already well-trod by Neil LaBute and other playwrights who treat the darker side of the masculine psyche, but though his play doesn't break much new ground, it enters a few unexplored and very murky corners en route to a shattering denouement.

The wrinkle here is that the embattled "couple" is heterosexual and male. For Max (Michael Weston), sex is conquest, and the more women he "scores," the better. Tension erupts when his best friend and co-womanizer, Finn (James Roday), shifts the familiar paradigm of their relationship during a get-away weekend in Atlantic City. Finn is newly in love and intent on fidelity, but when Max hires two "pros" for the occasion, Finn slams head-on into his own primordial need -- and it isn't pretty.

The cast includes several name actors, but there's no hint of a vanity production in Wayne Kasserman's smartly-paced staging. Amanda Detmer (from "Saving Silverman") plays effectively against type as a jaded casino worker who turns tricks to care for her ailing daughter. Stefanie E. Frame is richly sympathetic as a first-time hooker with a bad case of nerves.



From left, Amanda Detmer, Michael Weston, James Roday and Stefanie E. Frame. Credit: Kurt Boetcher.

Those familiar with Roday's gonzo character on television's "Psych" will find his quietly provocative performance a revelation. All coke-fueled jitters and cynicism, Michael Weston's Max excites nervous laughter with his viciously reductive views of women -- but the really scary thing is that his argument is so cogent. That's the savage twist that makes "Extinction" uniquely unsettling.

— F. Kathleen Foley

"Extinction," Elephant Space, 6322 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood. 8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays; 7 p.m. Sundays. Ends Dec. 13. \$18. (323) 960-7784.

www.plays411.com/Extinction.

Running time: 1 hour, 30 minutes.